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JOANNA TRAILL, SPINSTER

Feb. 12. 1894.

BY

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ANNIE E. HOLDSWORTH

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CENTRAL

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63-53

JOANNA TRAILL, SPINSTER.

CHAPTER I.

A QUESTION OF SETTLEMENTS.

"WE love that we may learn to live," Miss Traill said tremulously.

"A man is a fool sometimes, a woman is one always!" Mrs. Crane wafted her airy cynicism towards her sister as gracefully as she would have thrown her a kiss. "One would think, Joanna, you had lived long enough to learn the fallacy of love."

"Not from you, Sarah."

Mrs. Crane laughed.

"Oh! that is absurd. Marriage with me simply meant earning my living in the easiest way. I was twenty and penniless; under such circumstances one naturally falls in love. It is a different thing when one has an income and an establishment, and no need to marry at all."

"You forget the affections, Sarah."

"The affections? The fiddlesticks! Your

ideas, Joanna, are as out of date as your frock. I despair of you."

Mrs. Crane gave her shoulders a little eloquent shrug, and turned from her sister to the crewel work which ornamented her ease. Miss Traill sniffed in her corner. It was a peculiarly aggravating sniff, and it exposed her to an attack from the other side of the room. A little lady, plump and red-cheeked, who had been sitting in the bow of the window, put down the sock she was knitting, and came across to her sisters, bearing with her the final word.

"Crying? Joanna, that is really childish of you. And because you have refused to marry a man? Most women would be glad to have the chance of doing it. A man, too, who lives by his wits, and heaven knows what besides!"

"Or the other place," Mrs. Crane suggested.

Mrs. Prothero glanced a protest. "Sarah! But since the children are not here. . . . Tell me, Joanna, is that the husband for Miss Traill of The Hatch? It is impossible to entertain the idea for an instant."

"Of course it is." Mrs. Crane was vigorous in agreement. "Marriage is only a question of settlements; and he hasn't a sou. Besides, he is a Socialist — most paupers are — uneducated, a decided burr — Cornish, I think — and impossible in every way. I wonder, Joanna, you were

so foolish as to let him propose. Don't you know a woman's status can be told by the men who propose to her? A pauper! What will you gain by marrying him?"

"A home in a true heart — he says so himself. That is surely not to be despised."

At the last word Miss Traill raised her handkerchief to the eyes that obtruded themselves on her sister's notice.

"If you must weep, dear," said Mrs. Crane amiably, "let me offer you my *mouchoir*. There is nothing interesting in a grief enshrined in cambric, not even hemstitched."

Mrs. Crane's mockery stung Joanna into self-assertion. She lifted her face, which was thin, and, in spite of its reddened lids, expressionless, and fronted the two women.

"A year ago you would have let me marry any one; and nobody came, nobody." She twisted her fingers together, and her voice broke a little. "And now, when one who loves me comes forward, you would prevent my — my happiness. I don't expect anything from you, Sarah; you were always worldly-wise. But you, Rachel, with your dear husband and the little children, you . . . and both so much younger than myself," she concluded inconsequently, with a glance of appeal to the plump little person who bore the final word.

Mrs. Prothero responded kindly enough to the unspoken petition.

“You see, Joanna, it is so very evident that this man is attracted by your wealth. That is why Fergus objects to the match.”

“And a year ago you hadn’t a penny, and were a burden on your friends,” Mrs. Crane interrupted.

Her tones were delicately modulated, and her air was still that of one uttering graceful nothings; but her sister’s face quivered at her words.

“For shame, Sarah!” Mrs. Prothero cried, then turned to Miss Traill. “Can’t you understand, Joanna, that with all this property — the house alone is worth £400 a year — you are a person of consequence, and ought not to become the prey of any fortune-hunter? We who are your friends are against your accepting this offer. There is no more to be said.”

Miss Traill put out her hands as if to grasp something that was slipping from her.

“Then must I say no?” she quavered.

“Of course,” said Mrs. Crane.

“Fergus said you must.” Mrs. Prothero uttered her fiat.

Then for a long time there was silence.

The sunlight struggled in through the vine-covered windows, and a subtle fragrance of jas-

mine pervaded the room and the emotions of the three sisters. It intensified the pain of the one, and gave a touch of refinement to the sordid views of Mrs. Crane and the padded decisiveness of Mrs. Prothero.

The room was dark, oak-panelled, and low in the ceiling; and was full of furniture, not modern enough to please Mrs. Crane, nor sufficiently antique to be fashionable. The aggressive carpet had long since yielded up its colours to time. A touch of quaintness in the forms of the mahogany chairs and sofas redeemed them from vulgarity.

In spite of the obtrusive elegance of Mrs. Crane, Miss Joanna Traill was herself the most refined object in the room. Her hopeless face, with its colourless eyes and colourless hair, was not wanting in a certain charm of indefiniteness, strongly in contrast with the strident well-being of her sisters. Her sorrow set her on a higher pinnacle, and made her the superior of the two young and prosperous women who were uttering their fiat on her life with well-intentioned, unemotional cruelty.

Mrs. Crane's long fingers played idly with the silk she was embroidering, but she was not thinking of her work.

She swayed backwards and forwards in the rocking-chair, and gazed at her sister in an amused, meditative fashion.

“Imagine Joanna dreaming that any man would fall in love with her for herself!” she was thinking. “Of course, it’s her fortune this creature wants, not a spinster *passée*, broken-spirited, thirty-six. If she were ten years younger. . . . But no, she was never attractive. She was always weak and insipid, and her passion for sacrifice flattened down whatever character she might have started life with. She has given up everything for us, I suppose, so we ought to be grateful. And yet what right had she to inherit all uncle’s wealth to the exclusion of Rachel and me? The old bear! he always hated us. Well, it’s a comfort The Hatch has not gone out of the family. It is not a bad place on the whole, and this room is really good. It might be made quite respectable with different furniture. I must see to removing this rubbish.”

Her eyes made the circuit of the room, and rested with disapproval on Mrs. Prothero’s plump little figure, sitting in a high chair, the points of her sturdy feet vainly threatening the floor.

“Rachel has no style, none. And she is not clever. Who would imagine us sisters?” she thought, glancing at the languid elegance reflected in the mirror opposite.

Mrs. Prothero was, indeed, not elegant, but

there was about her a wholesome air of health and good-heartedness. And if she were not as clever as Mrs. Crane, she recognised her limitations. And this in itself implies brains and some ability.

She, too, was thinking about this offer of marriage, that had been a pebble thrown into the pool of Miss Traill's stagnant existence. "Poor Joanna," she said to herself, "she must be very lonely, after all. I wish he had been nice; she would be happier with a man to look after her. But it would not do. He is a penniless *roué*, and apoplectic, I am sure — stout men always are. His neck alone should deter any woman from marrying him. Poor Joanna! It is her first offer, and I dare say she would rather not be an old maid. She can't love an old gourmand like that; but no doubt she is attracted by the idea of being loved. Well, it is attractive, I own, if the man is of the right sort. Dear me, how pleased I should have been if he had been like my Fergus. Poor Joanna! . . . Well, the children shall come down very often to stay with her. The country air will do them good, and they will comfort her. Poor dear, how worn and white she looks, but she will get over it."

She glanced across at Miss Traill, sitting hopeless and dejected on the horsehair couch.

A strained, pathetic look was on her face. Her hands were never still for a moment.

A patch of sunlight brightened the colours of the faded carpet, and her eyes were fixed on this. A dim sense of revolt was in her heart, where a wakening protest feebly stirred its wings. Was she to be always tyrannised over by these sisters, who had already claimed the best years of her life?

She had stood in the place of parents to them, and for twenty years had been their slave. And now, when the means of independence were in her grasp, when a step would move her out of the reach of their despotism, the old habit of submission fettered her limbs, and chained her will to theirs.

After all, the despotism of a husband, being natural, must be less demoralising to a woman than the tyranny of sisters. Why should she not claim and hold her own advantage?

Mrs. Crane and Mrs. Prothero thought her meek-spirited and feeble, and knew nothing of the long stifled passion that clamoured now to make itself heard.

Yet she did not love this man; she only wanted his love. She was a woman with a woman's infinite craving for love — to be loved would be heaven.

Her life was empty and valueless. With love

it might be raised to what heights of noble renunciation and purpose.

She thought thus, yet no enthusiasm coloured her cheeks. Her eyes were cold and glassy when she looked up at Mrs. Crane's remark, "You must write your refusal to-day, Joanna."

"So — soon?" she faltered.

"Yes. In fact, you had better do it now, then we can see the note before we leave."

"Yes, write it now, Joanna," said Mrs. Prothero. "It is as well to get things over at once. Fergus says there's a great relief in finality."

Rebellion struggled in Joanna's heart, but obedience ruled her limbs like an instinct. She had been too long a slave to accept immediately her tardy freedom.

Use conquered reason, and she seated herself at the davenport, and with shaking fingers wrote her letter of refusal.

Two hours later Mrs. Crane and Mrs. Prothero had returned to their homes, leaving her to the barren solaces of her income and establishment.

CHAPTER II.

SOME ADVANTAGES OF PHILANTHROPY.

A LONG drive, tree-shadowed, swept from the Epsom-road up to the ancient elms in the midst of which stood The Hatch. The house was built of stone, showing grey where the walls escaped from the lichen and ivy which enfolded them. Even the diamond-paned windows were hidden by the green that had conquered the masonry and now assailed the roof. Under the trees the grass was short, and broken here and there by flower beds given over to the luxuriance of roses and vines returning to their primitive growths.

It was perhaps owing to the close foliage everywhere, the prevailing green or the dampness under the trees, that the place had an uncanny air. And yet this could not be the reason, for inside the house, away from the greenery, the impression of eeriness was still more accentuated. The hall, long, low, and panelled, with its huge empty fireplace and darkened windows, was not unlike a vault, and struck a chill to the bones of the visitor entering for the first time — a chill which needed all the gentle hospitality and

affected kindness of Miss Traill before it could be overcome.

All the rooms in the house were the same — spacious, panelled, low-roofed, sombre.

It was the kind of house with which one sometimes meets in those parts of Surrey unknown to the suburban builder. How it was that *The Hatch* had escaped a modern reputation for ghosts was a mystery to all unacquainted with its late owner, Colonel Smedley — the “old bear” of Mrs. Crane’s designation.

Sixty years ago he had bought the property, and had stamped out the embers of superstition that still smouldered about the place, and had offended the nostrils of all other intending purchasers. From the day *The Hatch* passed into the Colonel’s hands no one had dared to hint at a mystery — ghost or murder or scandal — in connection with the house.

The local population, befogged by allusions to offences against the laws of defamation of character, which included houses as well as people, were dulled into uncomprehending silence.

In a few years the story had died out; and when, forty years later, the Colonel’s three nieces were invited to spend a month of crucial enjoyment in the old house, they slept undisturbed by fears of supernatural visitors.

Away from their uncle the girls enjoyed the

coolness and greenery and shadow after the brick and mortar of Kensington; and their healthy appetites were not conducive to the discovery of ghosts. Joanna, who was of a more romantic and sentimental turn than her sisters, used to dream of lovers lingering under the trees, or pacing the long corridors; but no visions less material than these obtruded themselves on her mind.

Yet houses betray their internal history as surely as faces do; and just as a straight furrow or bent brow will reveal the secret story, so the history of a house, the tragedy and comedy of its life, may be deciphered in its walls. The Hatch had its tradition, vaguely remembered by one or two, and seldom alluded to now — how a doom had been spoken against the house that no bride should ever go from its threshold.

And how, one by one, the daughters of The Hatch had died, or left it unmarried, till one had defied the doom, and prepared the house for her marriage.

But on her wedding morning she was found dead on the threshold, and a dark stain on the library floor marked the spot where the bridegroom had taken his own life.

For years the place remained untenanted. Then the story became dim and indistinct. The house was let to a French Marquis, and the

riot that reigned thereafter would have expelled any ghost less inevitable than this of The Hatch.

But the place was doomed.

No gaiety could chase away the melancholy of its appearance. The Marquis escaped to riot elsewhere ; and tenant after tenant was in turn overcome by the unconquerable gloom of the place and its tradition.

Then it fell into Colonel Smedley's hands. He had no daughters for whom to fear ; but he subdued the ghosts and enjoyed the silence, till he changed it for the larger silence peopled by ghosts.

It was perhaps to show his scorn of the superstition that he left the estate, and the income attached to it, to his only unmarried niece, Joanna. By this act Miss Traill was made a wealthy spinster, and a target for the shafts of needy bachelors.

A week had gone by since she had refused the offer of marriage ; and the emotional phase through which she had passed was having its effect on herself.

She was still meek-eyed and apologetic ; but out of the elements of love and disappointment and baffled longing she was evolving a germ of self-assertion that would some day startle herself as much as her little world.

She sat in the dull room, where the grim

chairs had stood to witness her struggle with her sisters ; and by and by she became conscious of the tranquillising influences of monotony.

The faded carpet, the dark wood of panel and furniture, horsehair cushion, and leaf-filtered sunshine, all gave her a sense of soothing and calm.

Most women would have shuddered at the high-backed chairs ranged stiffly round the walls and only relieved by inhospitable couches ; and the magenta curtains must have offended the artistic sense of any person ; but to Joanna they were dear and lovely with the charm of association and proprietorship.

The old days, when a visit to The Hatch meant freedom from worry and glare and noise, were again with her. Once more she was a romantic girl, pausing in the rush of life to enjoy the leisure and space and suggestiveness of the quiet home. She had escaped for a moment from the sordidness of the house in Kensington ; and on the unrelenting sofa, forgetful of the horsehair present, she sat to dream of a future softly outlined that should yield to her need of love and sympathy.

She stroked the couch with gentle remembering fingers, and the familiar prick of the horsehair gave her a vague satisfaction. There might

be no future for her, but this house enshrined the best of her past, the gladdest days of memory.

She would not be altogether lonely, so long as she could live in the old fair days.

Her reverie was suddenly interrupted. Mrs. Crane had come in unannounced, and was now moving slowly and languidly up the long room.

The interruption was unwelcome, but Joanna looked at her sister with generous admiration.

Her tall figure showed slim and graceful in a gown of black silk that fitted with disguised art. Her face was overtopped by an abundance of yellow hair, and was distinguished rather than pretty, for the mouth was large, and the cheeks somewhat hollow. But she had wonderful eyes, softened by long black lashes, and a dazzling complexion that supported her claim to beauty.

In talking the rise and fall of her *pince-nez* was noticeable. When this did not call attention to her eyes she blinked short-sightedly — a well-considered affectation.

She swept up to her sister and, stooping, touched her cheek with her own.

“Well, Joanna, you were not expecting me, I know. How very dark the room is! I can see nothing.”

"This light is trying after the glare, Sarah."

"It must be. Your face is quite yellow and withered."

Miss Traill flushed slightly; but she was used to Mrs. Crane's frankness, and did not resent it.

"I slept badly last night," she said.

"Did you? How do you think I am looking this morning?"

"I never saw you look better. That gown is very becoming."

"So I think. Yet it is only Shoolbred's. By the way, I called there yesterday to see about your new furniture."

"My new furniture?"

"Yes. You can't live here with those bourgeois old things, you know."

"I had not thought of changing anything, Sarah."

"Oh, that's nonsense! No one will call on you so long as you have all this antiquated stuff in the house."

"The Rector and Mrs. Sinclair called yesterday."

"Of course they did. But that was a duty call. Don't be stupid, Joanna. You know I was referring to society and — and people of position and — and culture."

"Mr. Sinclair's sermon on Sunday was very

cultured. He has a fine appreciation of Bacon and Dante and Milton. Very cultured indeed."

"Joanna, you are positively imbecile! Nobody calls that sort of thing culture nowadays — it is not social culture. You ought to know that."

"I didn't know, I always thought" —

"Well, you need not think, but you ought to know. The whole duty of us moderns is to know the right thing to say and to do, to admire and to read. Nothing else is of any use. You are sadly behind the times. I shouldn't wonder if you admired all this atrocious furniture."

"I confess I do. When I remember all the happiness it gave me as a girl, and gives me now, I can't help loving it and" —

"Ah, I thought so. That is where your mistake lies. A better-bred woman would know not to admire anything that was out of fashion merely because it pleased her."

Miss Traill set her lips with a quite unwonted firmness that made her sister raise her *pince-nez* in astonishment. Happily, a diversion was caused by the entrance of Mrs. Prothero.

Mrs. Crane dropped her *pince-nez* and blinked with vexation. She had intended to have a long discussion as to the domestic arrangements of The Hatch, in which her sister would have

been helpless and at her mercy. Mrs. Prothero, she knew, was liable to disapprove and express disapproval; whereas Joanna suffered herself to be victimised in silence. Unconscious of her rôle of marplot, Mrs. Prothero bustled into the room, her bosom heaving, her face red and hot. Mrs. Crane, marking the contrast between herself and that heated person, forgave the vulgarity of her appearance.

“How beautifully cool you are in here,” panted the lady. “Good-morning, Joanna; I won’t kiss you. I am rather warm.”

She sank into a chair, and had untied her bonnet-strings before she saw Mrs. Crane.

“Why, good gracious! You here, Sarah? I thought you were going to Norwood to-day.”

“I changed my mind,” Mrs. Crane drawled, “and came here instead.”

“Oh!” said Mrs. Prothero.

The word contained a whole gamut of feeling that did not escape Mrs. Crane. She smoothed her skirt slowly, but her face wore its own airy good humour when she again glanced at her sister.

“I don’t regret my change of plans now that we have met, Rachel. It is a most excellent opportunity for discussing Joanna’s affairs.”

“Thank you.” Miss Traill hesitated. “But — but I think I can — can manage for myself in — in my affairs.”

“What?” shrieked Mrs. Crane, sitting up sharply. “Manage by yourself?”

“I — I think so, Sarah. I can arrange everything myself.”

Mrs. Prothero palpitated good-naturedly.

“You poor dear! Indeed you can’t. Fergus says you haven’t so much as claimed your identity these thirty years, Joanna.”

“I know,” said Miss Traill, a delicate colour flushing into her cheeks. “But I have new responsibilities, and, I trust strength to meet them.”

“Of course,” Mrs. Crane broke in quickly, “we know that. Indeed, it was to point out your responsibilities to society that I came down to-day!”

“Yes,” Mrs. Prothero agreed. “Fergus was saying last night that Joanna should assert herself, and take her proper place in society.”

“The very remark I made just before you came in, Rachel. Joanna can’t be a leader of fashion, but why shouldn’t she pose as a philanthropist? Lots of nice people are taking up philanthropy now.”

“I — don’t — know,” said Mrs. Prothero, weighing her words. “Perhaps it is too late for Joanna to attempt that sort of thing. Only quite young women can make it interesting. Besides, people can get on well enough without it. Fer-

gus says we are popular not for what we profess, but for what we are."

"That's all nonsense," said Mrs. Crane with decision. "It's not what you are, but what you profess, that carries the day."

"I should say it's not what you are, but what people think you to be, that is most useful," Mrs. Prothero asserted dryly.

"Yes," Mrs. Crane agreed. "Now, for instance, it would be useless for Joanna to pose as cultured."

"Culture never poses," said Joanna meekly.

"No; it only supposes," mocked Mrs. Crane. "What do you suppose it can do for you, Joanna?"

Again the delicate colour rose and flushed Miss Traill's face. "It can show me the unreality and emptiness of what you call society."

The worm had turned!

Mrs. Crane was horrified—in despair. She blinked violently.

"Joanna, with such ideas you can *never* be a social success."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Prothero, in her matter-of-fact tone. "Scorn of social ways is rather in vogue just now. In fact, enthusiasm is the catch word. Fergus says if you fly at anything, no matter if it's dogma or paupers or trades unions, you are at once in the fashion. Just now society is sacrificing to sincerity."

"It will not sacrifice itself to sincerity," said Mrs. Crane.

"I meant earnestness," said Mrs. Prothero, a little uncertain of what she did mean. "Dear me, how warm it is! . . . What do you do with yourself all day, Joanna?"

"I write a little, and visit the poor, and walk in the garden. And lately I have been making poultices for the coachman. I like it better than posing as a philanthropist."

Mrs. Crane shrugged her shoulders.

"No wonder you look bored. Poultices for the coachman! Joanna, you are hopeless."

"I like it. I am not bored. The work suits me," said Miss Traill eagerly. "It is pleasant to be able to do things for people."

Her face lighted up for an instant, and Mrs. Prothero glanced kindly at her.

"I don't think the quiet is good for you, Joanna. You are looking pale. Come and stay with me for a day or two next Monday. Baby Jo is growing a sweet child, and Sissie and Willie were asking to-day when they should see auntie again. 'Loving Auntie Joanna,' they call you."

Smiling brilliantly, Mrs. Crane rose and levelled her *pince-nez* at her sister.

"Your children are too clever, Rachel. If I had any jealousy in me I should quite resent

not having any babies to express my affection for Aunt Joanna. You will not care to stop at Rachel's more than two days, Joanna. I will call for you on Wednesday, and drive you back to The Hatch."

Miss Traill was in a flutter of indecision.

"I don't think I can go at all, thank you, Rachel; I don't, indeed. I should like to stay quietly at home for a few weeks. I am sure I am better at home."

"Nonsense! I'll not take no. I shall come for you on Monday; the children will enjoy the drive. Fergus will expect you; and there's no more to be said."

Mrs. Prothero fastened her bonnet-strings. And no more was said.

CHAPTER III.

AN ENTHUSIAST.

"MR. BOAS is coming to dinner to-night," said Mrs. Prothero.

"What is Mr. Boas?" asked Miss Traill timidly.

"It depends how you take him," Mrs. Prothero answered. "I know half a dozen contradictory epithets, each of which would describe him exactly. Let me see; we are not democrats, nor Salvationists, nor philanthropists, nor literary folk, nor newspaper editors. Indeed, Joanna, it is difficult to say which of his phases will describe him as you will see him to-night. However, he is an engineer; though that's nothing for you to go by."

"I wish he were not coming," Joanna sighed. "I know I shall not be able to get on with him."

"Oh, yes, you will. All women do. Fergus says it is because he is so undaunted an explorer of feminine virtues. I know he is very polite to women. I have seen him give his arm to a bundle of dirty rags, and lead her across Oxford

Circus with all the deference he would have shown to a countess. Yes, he has done that; though he knew Lady Carstairs was in her carriage waiting to cut him for doing it."

"I like him for it," said Joanna warmly.

"So do I. And, after all, he can afford to please himself, regardless of Lady Carstairs. Fergus says he is one of those men who set the fashion. I would have asked some people to meet him to-night if he had not begged for a quiet evening. He wants Fergus to start a society for supplying the old people in work-houses with tea and tobacco. He is the busiest man in London, yet he finds time for a hundred small missions of that sort. He lives somewhere in Westminster, and is always poking about trying to reform people. Fergus says he is much too modern to believe that regeneration begins at home."

"He must be very popular." Joanna's cynicism was purely accidental.

Mrs. Prothero shrugged her shoulders after the manner of Mrs. Crane, only without her easy grace.

"I can't say that. Few men have been so hated. He cares nothing for that. He has a great scorn of sham, and is proud to be a Cornishman."

"How fresh that sounds," said Joanna. "I shall like him."

“Well, don’t admire him too much. He is fresh; one of the most fascinating men in town; and consequently he is not a marrying man, Fergus says. It’s safer to let him admire you.”

A thin smile flitted like a ghost over Joanna’s face. She did not believe that Mr. Boas would so much as glance at her; and this conviction was so honest that, to Mrs. Prothero’s dismay, she appeared that evening in her dowdiest gown.

Mrs. Crane, all spangles and *pince-nez*, amply atoned for her sister’s deficiencies in toilet.

When Joanna, after the flutter of entrance had subsided, ventured to raise her eyes to study Mr. Boas, a rush of colour swept over her face, and her eyelids fell nervously.

She was distinctly disappointed.

The much-described man was a very little man, dark, and showing his Cornish descent in his face; with a mop of black curly hair, and deep eyes glowering under heavy brows. He was no carpet-knight, as was evident by the awkwardness of his demeanour when he conducted Mrs. Prothero to the dining-room.

The procession from the drawing-room was humorous in its extremes.

Mr. Prothero boasted six feet of fine proportions that accorded well with Mrs. Crane’s height

and slimness. Mrs. Prothero, dark, stout, short, was a female copy of Mr. Boas.

Between these two couples — a hyphen lightly traced — walked the colourless personalities of Miss Joanna Traill and Mrs. Crane's husband.

As dinner went on it pleased Joanna to see that Mr. Boas's appetite waited on his absorption in the topics discussed. When his eye kindled, and he showed his enthusiasm, she recognised the individuality that conquered disadvantages of person and, better than the others, she understood the secret of his influence.

Mrs. Crane sat silent, and did not even blink at the savage. She had discovered early in the meal that he was more interested in abstract woman than in the concrete reality, as represented by her; and she had consigned him to the limbo of her disregard.

Mrs. Prothero was admiring "Fergus," to the great disparagement of Mrs. Crane's husband and Mr. Boas. And of the three, only Joanna was even tolerant of the guest of the evening. The men thought him insufferable.

Certainly he delayed the courses while he talked.

He leaned his elbows on the table, and his eyes flashed and lightened under the fire of his rapid words.

"What these poor creatures want is not sis-

terhoods, but sisters," he was saying. "I don't give a fig for the curate in petticoats. They want women to go among them, with the tender touch of women for their bleeding hearts, and the tears of women for their unutterable wrongs. They want sisters, not of the Church, but of humanity. Women who will love them and live with them, and work with them, and teach them the mighty possibilities of womanhood. Talk about civilisation!—that is the only civilisation that can touch the slums. I have been down in the worst parts. I know London, east and west, as few know it. I tell you that when we have settlements of true men and women put right down among these hopeless creatures, then, and not till then, shall we touch the sore to heal it."

He crumbled his roll savagely, and went on:—

"That is what I am working for now. Down in Shoreditch I have a house preparing, and when it is ready a dozen men and women will go into it, and each man will have his district and begin house-to-house working in it. He will be the friend of every man, woman, and child in his district. He will be a kind of human Providence that the people can trace as well as trust. He will teach them thrift, and invest their savings for them. He will share in their inmost hope and sorrow. And he will do all,

not caring a hang to what Church they belong, or what creed they hold, so long as they have faith in themselves and each other."

"That sort of thing has been tried over and over again — at Toynbee Hall, for instance. It is nothing new," said Mr. Prothero, who was feeling bored.

"New? It's as old as the Divine breath in Adam! Toynbee Hall has done good work; but I want a settlement to every hundred people; not one to every five millions. If I could get a nucleus of five hundred friends to co-operate with me, the thing would be done before I am a year older."

He rolled his bread into little pellets, which he threw in different directions along the tablecloth, till Mrs. Crane's playful tones interrupted the pastime.

"Five hundred *friends* to co-operate with you, Mr. Boas? Are you not too optimistic?" she asked, smiling archly. "I thought the world was peopled by two classes — the great majority that swear at you, and the infinitesimal minority that swear by you. Isn't it so?"

"It is," said Mr. Boas, unheeding her blandishments, "and the majority are mostly fools. Fools? Ay, fools of the blackest, the deepest — Look here! If we were told that to-morrow there would be a human sacrifice on Tower-hill;

that a young maiden and a youth were to be offered up to a hellish monster; that the monster was waiting to devour the tender young limbs, and lick up the blood of the young beautiful lives — would we sit here calmly, and say that such things were inevitable? that such horrors were a necessary phase of our civilisation? Oh, you people! . . . Wouldn't the nation rise to a man to forbid the horrid deed? . . . Wouldn't our women weep and our men work till . . . Wouldn't? . . . Oh, God? Wouldn't . . . ”

His voice broke, and he threw himself back in his seat in a passionate despair. Then he steadied himself.

“I tell you,” he said, and there was a ring of terrible conviction in his voice, “it is a fact that not one — not two — but four hundred men and women, fair girls and brave boys, are offered up in this city every day — *every day* — to the demon of passion and lust.”

Again his voice broke, and the tears stood large in his eyes. He looked round at his listeners. The glance encountered nothing but unsympathetic faces.

Mrs. Crane was sitting haughtily erect, her lips pursed over the words “bad form.”

Mrs. Prothero's eyes were appealing to Fergus. He and Mrs. Crane's husband were in hot pursuit of an exhausted appetite; and

Mr. Boas looked from one to the other in vain. All at once his glance fell on an eager face, and he knew he had found a listener.

An hour ago "My sister, Miss Traill," had not roused his interest.

He had seen a not-young, badly dressed woman, shyly acknowledging his bow; and had dismissed her as an uninteresting part of the evening's sacrifice.

Now her eyes were alight, her cheeks flushed, her air exalted. The woman's heart had been possessed by his man's enthusiasm, and fruit of noble effort would follow. He had not spoken uselessly.

When the men joined the ladies afterwards in the drawing-room he at once crossed to Joanna's side.

"Are you interested in the condition of the poor?" he asked, taking the seat next to hers.

"No — yes," stammered Miss Traill, twisting her hands together nervously; "that is — I don't know. I have never given the subject a thought."

"But surely it has your interest. At dinner I thought you sympathised with us."

"Not at all. That is, I couldn't, you know. It would be impossible. . . . My sisters would never. . . . Oh! . . ."

Joanna stopped incoherently, overcome by an agony of self-consciousness.

Mr. Boas was distressed by her nervousness, and impatient of it he glanced round the room for a way of escape.

Mrs. Prothero's little ones had just been brought in by their nurse. His face relaxed, and by some strange attraction he drew them immediately to him.

He seemed to charm the children. In five minutes Willie was on one knee, Sissie on the other, as friendly as though they had known him all their lives.

Mrs. Prothero beamed on the trio from afar. But Mrs. Crane's regards were distinctly adverse when, a moment later, Mr. Boas went down on all fours and careered round the drawing-room with the shouting children on his back.

"Thank heaven it is only a family party!" Mrs. Crane said to herself.

"Auntie Joanna, Auntie Joanna, hold Sissie's hand — Sissie yiding effalunt. Auntie hold Sissie's hand," the little girl cried.

"You had better take her hand, Miss Traill. Her seat is not very firm," said the "effalunt," looking up, and shaking his mop of hair from his eyes.

This was less discomposing than a conversa-

tion, and Auntie Joanna was annexed by the riotous party, and soon found herself entering into the fun as heartily as her small nephew and niece.

When they had exhausted that game they sat down, and while Sissie contentedly found a seat on Mr. Boas's knee, Willie sat astride the arm of his aunt's chair.

Imperceptibly the talk glided from fairies and hobgoblins to East-end humanity; and by the time the unwilling children had been carried away, the two elders were deep in the discussion that had so fluttered Miss Traill a little while before. She found it easy to talk to him, and she told him how gladly she would give her life to the work of which he had spoken, if her new responsibilities did not weigh upon her.

He listened deferentially, and a few questions laid the woman's nature bare before his eyes.

"That sort of work is not for you," he said. "you must learn first to deal with individuals before you can serve humanity in the lump. I know a girl to whom you can be of the greatest use. Will you undertake the case?"

"Most gladly," said Joanna, her eyes sparkling.

He gave her a searching glance before which she did not falter.

“God bless you!” he said impulsively. “Come to my office, 522 George St., Westminster, to-morrow at eleven. Good-night.”

He gave her hand a hard clasp: and when she had recovered from the tumult into which his words had thrown her, he was gone.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS TRAILL FINDS AN EXCUSE FOR LIVING.

JOANNA slept ill that night, and rose the next morning in fear and uncertainty.

Her liberty weighed on her more heavily than her shackles had done; and the idea of the self-assertion she meditated was a positive terror to her. While she dressed she trembled.

Ever since she could remember she had submitted to the will of her imperious sisters, and she could not recall an instance of taking any important step without their sanction. Apart from them, too, the magnitude of the step contemplated frightened her. She had never been in town by herself. Her excursions from the Kensington house had always been in company with her sisters, and were on no business more weighty than the selection of a gown or a bonnet.

Now she was not only going unprotected through the perils of Victoria, but she was about to be initiated into the mysteries of a busy man's office; and all without the consent or presence of the custodians of her personality.

It was enough to excite even a less-cloistered person than she. She dressed in some agitation, and arrived in the breakfast-room with a look so apologetic and guilty that she would at once have betrayed herself to Mrs. Prothero if that lady had not been distracted by anxiety. Fergus had taken only one cup of coffee for breakfast, and she was worrying herself with conjectures as to the reason.

Her sister's wretched appearance was dismissed in a phrase, "Joanna, you look as though you had a headache."

"Auntie Joanna looks very funny, I think — just like pussie after she has been stealing," said Willie, clearer-sighted than his mother to detect shades of expression.

Joanna sat down, her grey eyes shifting uneasily under the child's gaze. She avoided her sister's eye, but was so nervous that the spoons and forks clattered when she touched them. She went through her old-fashioned form of grace as usual and mingled with the thanksgiving a little natural gratitude that it was Mrs. Prothero, and not Mrs. Crane, with whom she had to deal.

"I should not be able to do it if Sarah were here," she said to herself; and she waited till the children had gone before introducing the subject with which she was burdened.

She hemmed ineffectually once or twice, and at last Mrs. Prothero spared a moment from her wifely anxieties for her sister.

"Your voice seems troublesome. Have you taken cold?"

"No," said Joanna; "I hope not, for I have an important engagement this morning. I am going to meet Mr. Boas."

"To meet Mr. Boas!" Mrs. Prothero stared; a spoon poised in the air like an embodied note of exclamation.

"Yes, at his office in Westminster," said Joanna, deprecatingly.

"*Well!*" Mrs. Prothero interjected, after an eloquent pause.

"He wants me to do some work for the poor."

"Is that all?" Mrs. Prothero's face fell, but it brightened again immediately. "So you are going to work with him? Really, Joanna, I should never have thought you capable of anything so clever. That is to say" — she corrected herself quickly — "Sarah and I agreed that the *rôle* of philanthropy would just suit you."

"I am not going in for philanthropy. I shall only help people who need help, you know."

"Well, sometimes it is the same thing, isn't it?"

"Then you don't object to my going, Rachel?"

"Object? No, indeed," Mrs. Prothero laughed. "I think you are very wise. I suppose you want me to go with you?"

"N — no, thank you, Rachel. I think I can manage alone."

Mrs. Prothero laughed again, and shook a playful finger at her sister.

"Ah, Joanna, we shall see you a woman of the world yet. I wonder what Fergus will say when he hears of it."

Miss Traill was almost as much nonplussed by the manner in which her announcement had been received as she would have been by opposition to her plans. But the absence of discussion heartened her for the meeting before her. She was quite grateful to Mrs. Prothero for her approval, and she started for town in a flutter of pleasant anticipation. To her own surprise, she proved equal to the demands of taking her ticket and afterwards of calling a cab — a four-wheeler; and, with a new sensation of self-respect, she found herself making her way alone through the streets of London.

She was at Mr. Boas's office before she had begun to feel nervous, and though her knees trembled as she climbed the stair, emotional exaltation bore her like a tide over her self-con-

sciousness. She paused a little outside the door on which she read "Boas and Co." Then she knocked, turned the handle, and went in.

Two young men standing at high desks looked up at her entrance, and one came forward, and behind the protection of a counter demanded her errand.

"I wish to see Mr. Boas," she said.

He threw a comprehensive smile at his fellow ; then glancing at Joanna took in the details of her dress and manner. "Mr. Boas is not in," he said patronisingly.

"I think you are mistaken," said Joanna with dignity. "Be so good as to inquire."

He came leisurely from behind the counter, and went into the room adjoining, from which he issued again, accompanied by a young woman, who stared insolently at Joanna.

"Another of them," she said to the youth in an audible aside. Then very pertly to Joanna, "You have to make an appointment before you can see Mr. Boas."

"Mr. Boas is expecting me," said Joanna.

The young woman's face said plainly that she did not believe her, but she turned and went again into the other room.

In a few moments another clerk appeared — a gentlemanly fellow, with a head like that of an ancient Greek.

"You have an appointment with Mr. Boas?" he asked pleasantly.

"Yes, at eleven. It is now five minutes past," Joanna said, holding up her watch for him to see.

It was a fine gold lever, and there was an added deference in his voice when he next spoke.

"Will you come this way, please? Mr. Boas is engaged just now, but he will soon be able to see you."

He ushered her into a waiting room, and Joanna's tension relaxed when she found herself alone.

She looked round the room with interest; at the leather-covered chairs, the newspapers and circulars heaped on bookcase and table, the hat and coat thrown on the couch in the corner.

The roar of the great city scarcely penetrated the silence; it came to her ears as a murmurous background only. By and by voices intruded on the quiet; a man's deep bass, a woman's passionate treble.

"Oh, Mr. Boas! you are my only friend. You make me want to be good. No one ever helped me but you. Oh, you don't know how I love and worship you for your goodness!"

Then — "My good child, don't be so silly. Don't kneel to me. Great heaven! is a man to

see a woman sinking and not stretch a hand to save her? There, there! What an excitable child you are. Go away now. I'll call you when the thing is settled."

A door closed sharply, and before Joanna had time to be shocked there was a step behind her, and she turned to face Mr. Boas.

He held out his hand in a casual fashion.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, — that poor child was hysterical. This way. . . . I am going to take you into my sanctum." He led her through the door into a smaller room, the walls of which were lined with books. Over the mantel-piece was a copy of Rossetti's "Annunciation," the butt of the men who frequented the office. In the midst of the papers strewn on the table was a huge bowl of tea-roses.

"Sit down," said Mr. Boas. "You want work; what will you do? — take my hysterical child in hand?"

"The one who was with you just now?" asked Joanna, not concealing the disapproval the girl's words had roused in her. Boas shot a keen glance at her.

"Oh, you heard her? Poor little thing, she is as undisciplined in her gratitude as in everything else. She expressed unutterable devotion to me just now. With some men that sort of thing might be dangerous."

A slight hauteur made itself felt in Joanna's silence. This was not exactly what she had been strung up to meet. Mr. Boas was more human than she had expected. It was disappointing.

"I cannot undertake any work of which my sisters would disapprove," she said. "I don't wish to pain them."

Boas looked steadily at her a moment.

"My dear lady, you cannot sacrifice your power and your liberty to save your sisters' feelings. You have your own claims; you are your own sphere. Do first your duty to yourself."

"I know," Joanna hesitated; "but" —

"The question is: Are you going to let your life purpose be your law, or their law your life purpose?"

"I have always let them decide for me, and" —

"Very well. If you can't at once rise to obedience to your own instincts, you can at least resist your tendency to be dominated. Now your work is before you. See it and do it, as I know you will. Here's this child, at sixteen beguiled into — hell. I found her there, almost dead. After that, what is before her if she is left to herself? No father, no mother. God help her! She needs a friend, a Christ to

redeem her from worse than death. Will you help her?"

"I will," said Joanna, her eyes full of tears.

"God bless you!"

He rose and touched the bell. "Send that girl in," he said, when the young man with the Greek face came in.

The door opened again, and this time Boas rose and put a chair near to his own.

"Come here; sit down," he said to the girl, who stood timidly inside the door. Then to Joanna, "Miss Traill, this is Christine Dow."

Joanna glanced shyly at the girl, and Boas, watching her face, saw that he had nothing to fear. In that look Joanna had been won by his *protégée*.

He wondered a little at the quick victory, for though Christine had roused his sympathy, he had never thought of her as possessing attraction. He looked curiously now at her.

She was very tiny and childish, with pretty pouting lips, and red cheeks dimpled and soft as a baby's. Her fair hair was elaborately frizzed over an exquisite forehead, and eyes shy and confiding, and pathetic with recent tears.

The child's face was refined and delicate. Her dress and hat outraged every canon of taste.

She gave a quick, timid glance at Miss Traill, and then stood with downcast eyes till Boas told her again to sit down.

Then she flushed, looked brightly at him, and seated herself, waiting demurely to be spoken to.

"I want to be your friend, Christine," said Joanna tremulously. "But tell me first about your life."

"There's nothing to tell," said the girl, becoming unexpectedly sulky. "Father was a schoolmaster, starved out by the board schools. A woman took me to live with her when he died. She died too; and I worked in a match factory. But I couldn't get what would keep me, and I fell ill. Then a girl they called Nella took me to her house. And they nursed me and were kind. I got plenty to eat there, and they promised me pretty clothes when I got better. And I owed the woman money and I didn't know how to pay her. And Nella was happy, and it seemed easy enough, so one night" — She stopped, turned pale, and dropped her head. Then she looked up defiantly, and dashed the tears from her eyes. "And I'd have killed myself afterwards if Mr. Boas hadn't found me," she concluded.

"Poor child, poor child," said Joanna, weeping herself. "But now you wish to live a good life? You will try to be a good woman?"

Christine covered her face and began to sob and moan.

"I had never a chance ; I hadn't no chance. It wasn't my fault. There was nobody to tell me. And I didn't know. Rich people ain't like poor folk. It ain't fair they should judge."

She swept her hand across her eyes and glared passionately at Joanna.

"My poor child, you shall have a chance," said Miss Traill. "I am your friend."

"I don't want friends," said Christine ; "only him." Her finger indicated Boas. "He was good to me. I want money, and plenty to eat, and things to wear. That's what I want."

"You are a little heathen," said Boas, taking up a sheet of paper, and writing while he listened.

"You shall have these, my dear — suitable clothes and food," said Joanna. "And you will go to a home where you may be taught to be a good woman."

"I won't." She stamped her foot, and her eyes flashed with anger. "I know them homes. They kill you with their pious ways. Good people ain't kind, like bad 'uns. I won't go. I don't want to be a good woman — not that sort, leastways."

"But afterwards you shall come and live

with me, and be my little maid," said Joanna encouragingly.

The girl darted a swift glance at the lady, and a wicked light of humour crept into her eyes and played about her mouth. She hung her head to conceal it, and fingering the fringe of her shawl she said hesitatingly —

"Do you live in the West-end?"

"No; at Sutton in Surrey, at a large old house, standing quite by itself. A beautiful quiet place where no one ever comes."

"Not even your company?"

"I never have any, my dear. You need not be afraid. If you came to me no one would ever see you, and you would see no one. You could forget the past and become a good, pure woman, in spite — in spite of your sorrowful girlhood."

Miss Traill touched the subject with embarrassment.

"And you wouldn't send me to a 'home'?"

Joanna glanced at Boas, and taking her cue from him she answered.

"For a time only. Then you would come to me."

The girl tilted her head one side, and rapidly weighed the situation. She was unscrupulous, and had little sense of right and wrong. Her passionate revolt against life had been due almost as much to its hardship as to its evil.

She was a luxurious, ambitious little creature, with nothing but an instinct of purity and a strong love of cleanliness to save her from uttermost degradation.

The prospect of becoming Miss Traill's maid in a dull country house was not alluring, and did not agree with the visions Mr. Boas had inspired of her future. While she remained silent she rapidly weighed the chances for and against her ultimate success in bettering the position offered to her.

Her keen eyes had noted the impression she had made on Joanna, and again she glanced sharply at her.

The pale, unassuming face promised nothing — baffled her ignorant search. Its quietness had the force of strength. It was a risk to match her cleverness against that silent power. Yet she dared not offend Mr. Boas by refusing to walk in the way he had found for her out of her shame.

She burst into tears and sobbed wildly.

"I won't go to the home! I won't! I ain't that sort — not like the low girls in Seven Dials. They always said I was a lady. I don't want religion; and if you send me to the home I don't want your help neither."

Mr. Boas looked up from his writing.

"My good girl, you are acting and speaking very foolishly."

Joanna rose with a weary look on her face. She felt herself unequal to the task of directing this wild, undisciplined nature. The responsibility of undertaking Christine's guidance frightened her. The girl's stormy passions deterred her.

Yet she was bitterly grieved to leave Christine without making an effort to help her into a better life.

"If I had an interest like that, if I could be useful to her, it would be an excuse for living," she thought to herself.

Aloud she said, while her lips trembled: "I have taken up your time, Mr. Boas. You see Christine does not want any help I can give her. I am very grieved."

Boas rose from his chair, glowering under his heavy brows.

"It's not your fault. I'm sorry I brought you here. I didn't expect the girl to behave like this. I thought she wished to be a good girl, but I see she doesn't. She has disappointed me. . . . Well, I can do nothing more for her. I'm sorry."

"I am very, very sorry," said Joanna tearfully. "I would have done my best for her. . . . Good-bye, Christine."

She held out her hand to the girl, who stood shamefaced at Boas's words and did not take it. Joanna gazed sadly at her.

“Oh, my dear! my dear!” she said, impulsively. “I would have loved you if you would have let me. I would have been a mother to you.” She turned and walked to the door, but with a bound Christine was at her side, and had seized her hand and was covering it with tears and kisses.

“Don’t go! don’t go!” she sobbed. “You are good, like him—you are kind. You will teach me to be good. I won’t disappoint him. I do want to be good. I won’t go to the home; but I will go with you to that horrid, dull old house, if he will come and see me sometimes. I don’t want him to be disappointed in me.”

Joanna paused undecidedly, and looked towards Boas, but he signed her to go. “No more hysterics, Christine!” he said sternly. “You have thrown away your chance.”

He opened the door for Joanna, and whispered a word as they passed through the adjoining room.

“She will value it the more if she does not get it too easily.”

“Let her come to me,” said Joanna, clasping her hands excitedly. “She is quite right. A rescue home is not the place for her. Let her come to me. I have no one—no object; she will give me an interest in life.”

“No,” said Boas, affecting carelessness; “let

her go. If she were honest she would do anything to get away from temptation. She has had her chance; let her go. She is a bad little thing. I don't think she will ever be tamed."

Joanna straightened herself, and her grey eyes flashed.

"You can't prevent me doing the work I have been called to," she said quietly. "God has sent me this child that by loving I may learn to live. I must take her in spite of you."

Boas turned sharp round and grasped her hand, smiling in a pleased fashion that lightened his whole face.

"You have learned your lesson very quickly, Miss Trill; truth to yourself first. I have no fear now either for you or Christine. But she must not go to you just yet. Leave me to arrange. You shall hear from me."

He closed the door and left Joanna in a dream outside.

When she got back to Croydon Mrs. Prothero was suffering a visit from Mrs. Crane. That lady looked curiously at her sister. For the first time in her life Joanna had roused her respect, by her apparent cleverness in following up Mr. Boas's interest in her.

CHAPTER V.

HIGH ART.

MRS. CRANE was determined not to be outdone by her sister in civility to Joanna. When her visit to Mrs. Prothero came to an end she drove over from Carshalton where she lived to take her home to The Hatch.

Mrs. Prothero invited herself to accompany them, and in consequence Joanna had to sit with her back to the horses. She was accustomed to this arrangement. It was one that prevailed whenever she made a third in Mrs. Crane's carriage. When she drove out with Mrs. Prothero, that lady insisted on her taking precedence in the matter of comfort.

The three were in a state of controlled excitement. The married sisters were charged with a secret. Joanna had not got over the effects of her interview with Mr. Boas. To-day she looked on the world with new eyes — eyes that weighed everything in a scale adjusted to Christine. She imagined her little maid at home to receive her; her eyes flashing when she described to her all that she had seen and heard

on her visit. She imagined her removing her outdoor wraps quickly and deftly, and flitting about the room preparing the tea, and doing a hundred little services that she had never dared to ask of the taciturn maid that waited on her. A woman's first necessity is some one to talk to.

Joanna began to understand that Christine would supply a need, and she was impatient for the time when Mr. Boas would allow the girl to come to her.

The first horror and recoil over, Joanna had determined to forget Christine's history. The girl's past should be a limb taken from her life; and though she might be maimed, the scar was to be concealed. Her story was to remain a secret. She was to begin life again unshackled. The future was before her, white and unsullied. The black past was to be wiped out, as though it had not been. So Joanna ordered, taking no account of the grim law that makes the past supreme over present and future; a fate not to be escaped from; a chain that fetters the unborn child with the father's sin.

No shadow of an inexorable law clouded her face as the carriage bowled along. The optimism of content was upon her.

"How well you are looking, Joanna. You have quite a colour," said Mrs. Prothero, after a

lengthened survey of her sister. Mrs. Crane raised a long-handled lorgnette to her eyes.

"I never saw you look so well," she drawled. "Really, your face is positively animated."

Joanna blushed, and hugged her secret. She had not spoken of Christine to either of her sisters.

There would be a struggle, she knew; and this she would face when her plans had gained cohesion and force from time and Mr. Boas.

"Positively animated," Mrs. Crane continued. "It shows that you need rousing. The Hatch is too dull and quiet. By the way, there is some ghost story connected with the house, Charlie was saying; but there always is with these houses. I am not interested in superstitions and ghosts. Besides, no ghost can live where there are pictures and light and pretty things — and society. Of course, you must have society."

"Yes," said Joanna eagerly, "I have been thinking so. The servants are all too old and quiet. I should like some one young and bright in the house."

"Willie and Sissie shall spend most of their time with you," said Mrs. Prothero, beaming upon her.

"Willie and Sissie are not the universe," said Mrs. Crane sharply. "Joanna wants companionship."

"Yes; some one older, to live with me always; not a child, but a young girl." Joanna faltered, feeling that her secret was slipping from her.

"A young girl? — twenty young girls!" Mrs. Crane's bosom swelled generously.

"You must fill The Hatch with company that can appreciate your new furniture."

"I have made up my mind not to buy anything new," said Joanna dreamily.

The others exchanged glances.

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Crane briskly. "We can never allow that. That antiquated horse-hair would doom any woman, without anything else. You won't be satisfied with uncle's furniture long, Joanna. It is very fortunate that we are here to manage things for you. You have no ideas, no imagination, no ambition."

Joanna held a meek silence. When would she have courage to take the reins of government into her own hands? But she was too happy to be long depressed.

She turned her eyes on the fields they were passing, and noted with delight the delicate poise of leaf and stem against the sky; and the filmy veil of the summer cloud hanging on the blue.

The hedgerows were dreamy with roses, and flowering grasses idealised every ditch and road-

side. All was green, fresh, newly blossoming, the tender life of the springtime still beating and throbbing in summer's young maturity. The ivied gables of The Hatch rose over the trees on her left, and her heart bounded at the sight of them. It was her first home-coming since the place had passed into her hands.

As they wound round the road and drove through the lodge-gates, where a woman curt-sied her welcome, she began to realise that the place was hers.

For the second time she felt the stirring of a life independent from that of her sisters. She became conscious of herself apart from them, and the consciousness deepened when she met the servants in the hall and received from them a more deferential welcome than that accorded to her sisters.

She responded shyly to their greeting — half apologetic to Mrs. Crane and Mrs. Prothero for taking precedence of them in this fashion — and led the way to the drawing-room, her sisters following with a strange air of mystery and expectation. On the threshold Joanna stopped and gazed before her in blank horror.

The shabby, dim-lighted room Joanna had left was a blaze of light and colour, the sun flooding in through gorgeous rose silk curtains.

The ivy had been cut away from the win-

dows, that looked like eyes shorn of their eyebrows, and the unusual glare showed her that the room had been transformed.

Its ugly comfort had been made to give way to uncomfortable ugliness.

An Axminster carpet assailed the eyes, its tones making loud harmony with the covers on table and sofa.

Half a dozen Louis Quatorze chairs, gilt-legged, crimson-brocaded, struggled against the rival gorgeousness of plush-covered settees.

Small round tables alternated with small square tables — the offspring, apparently, of two adult tables that filled the foreground.

A bunch of peacock feathers looked from a vase of blue porcelain; and with suburban inevitableness, pampas grasses ornamented the mantelpiece on either side of a gold clock imprisoned in glass.

Near the door a Japanese screen affronted the glories of an Indian portière.

The oak wainscot had been enamelled blue and gold, to match a blue satin paper studded with gold discs. On this background hung the most pronounced pictures of the Impressionist school, in place of the old engravings that had been Joanna's delight, and would have been Mrs. Crane's, had she known their value.

The whole room was a violent altercation in upholstery.

Joanna gasped as she saw it, then turned a white, helpless face to the eager eyes of her sisters.

"Isn't it perfect?" asked Mrs. Crane triumphantly.

"I never imagined anything so beautiful," said Mrs. Prothero, her plump face broken up into smiles of delight and wonder. "*Such* an improvement! Fergus chose the carpet. Joanna, aren't you charmed?"

"It has made a different place of the room," said Mrs. Crane. "No one would ever suspect The Hatch of containing such a boudoir."

"No one would, indeed," Joanna said quietly.

Her tone startled the two ladies into a prolonged stare.

"Joanna! Aren't you pleased?"

Mrs. Crane dropped her *pince-nez*, and glared at her sister with the eye unadorned.

"It should not have been done without my consent," said Joanna, facing her bravely, though her face was trembling.

"Your consent?" laughed Mrs. Crane. "Why, who would have thought we needed to ask it? We were doing you a favour. We intended it as a pleasant surprise."

"It is very good of you, Sarah, but if you had meant to make me a present, some other way. . . ."

"A present!" . . . Mrs. Crane shrieked.

"It is not a present," Mrs. Prothero explained. "Shoolbred supplied the things. You will find his account in that drawer. We only intended to save you the trouble of choosing for yourself."

"You are very good," said Joanna again, a note of bitterness in her voice.

She was pale and very angry, and she bit her lips to suppress the hard truths she wished to hurl at her sisters.

"*Well, Joanna!*"

Mrs. Crane threw the words at her, and sank into a chair in offended silence.

All the bubbling good-nature passed out of Mrs. Prothero's face, leaving it blank and vacuous. She sat down suddenly on one of the eighteenth-century chairs, her weight causing the spindle-legs to shiver.

Miss Traill stood before them, like a culprit awaiting sentence, till Mrs. Crane spoke.

"I must say you are a very difficult person to deal with, Joanna. For a week we have worked like slaves to please you, and this is all the thanks we get. But it is always the way; there is no gratitude in the world."

She shut her lips close and looked resigned.

"And Fergus spent a whole morning choosing the carpet," interjected Mrs. Prothero, patheti-

cally. "He was determined to get those colours. I don't know what he will say. . . ."

"I know you meant it kindly," Joanna said, keeping her voice well under control. "I have no doubt you thought you were relieving me of some trouble; but you forgot one thing — that I am mistress of The Hatch!"

"Mistress of The Hatch?" Mrs. Crane echoed, wide-eyed.

Mrs. Prothero put her handkerchief to her face.

"Yes," said Joanna, sitting down with a dignity sufficiently impressive, if a trifle forced — "yes; I am mistress here. You must not forget that again, if you please. You have your house, Sarah, and you yours, Rachel. I should not insult either of you by interfering with your domestic arrangements. I require from you the same consideration with regard to mine. You exceeded all bounds when you cut down my ivy and furnished a room in my house."

When the silence following this speech had lapsed she went on again: "I think it right to tell you that in future my actions will not be altogether guided by you. Your tastes and mine are very dissimilar. This room, for instance, seems to me a little — a little — vulgar."

"Vulgar?" said Mrs. Crane, sitting up very stiffly. "Vulgar? It is the height, the very

height, of high art. That paper is prettier than any of William Morris's; the carpet was a guinea a yard. You know very little of art if you think them vulgar. Everything is in the extreme of the mode. If you were more accustomed to drawing-rooms that are regulated by fashion you would think yours perfect."

"Possibly," said Joanna dryly. "But I know so little of east-end drawing-rooms, you see."

Mrs. Crane fell back in her chair, and blinked many times before she recovered from the shock of this speech. Coming from Joanna it was unprecedented, incredible.

"It will be very awkward for us if you send the things back," said Mrs. Prothero nervously. "You are not thinking of doing that, Joanna?"

"I have not decided yet what I shall do," said Joanna. Her first impulse had been to get rid of this gaudy show of blue and gilt and satin, and to restore the room to the simplicity and primness she loved; but a sudden thought of Christine had checked the impulse. The girl had objected to come to "the dull old house." The bright colours would please her, and lighten the gloominess that was a rest to her own tired spirit.

Well, for Christine's sake she would put up with the ugliness and pretension she hated.

But she was very angry still at her sisters'

interference with her *ménage*; and wrath gave her courage for the announcement she had dreaded.

She had trembled a little when she had answered Mrs. Crane, but now she spoke boldly, and with a subtle definiteness in her voice that checked her sisters' protests.

"It is possible I may keep the furniture; not because I admire it, or because you have chosen it, but for the sake of the girl who is coming here to live. Young things like plenty of light and colour."

She paused to gain breath and to give time for the thunder of exclamations she expected. But the cloud was not ready to burst, and she went on, in her agitation making her terms vague and ambiguous.

"I intend to receive a young girl here. She is an orphan, and friendless. I hope to be a mother to her; and she will give me companionship, and be an interest in my life."

"An adopted child?" Mrs. Crane screamed, clutching at the obvious interpretation of the words. "You will make her your heir, for you will never marry. That is the doom of The Hatch; its women are always single. And without consulting us" —

"Don't you think it a good plan?" Joanna addressed Mrs. Prothero, taking no notice of

Mrs. Crane, who rose, sweeping her skirts round her in a magnificent disdain.

“There is no place for us here, Rachel. Come !”

Mrs. Prothero looked up piteously and then began to sob. “Oh, Joanna, I never expected it of you. To set aside Willie and Sissie, your own flesh and blood, for a stranger ! And after all Fergus has done for you — introducing you to Mr. Boas, and choosing the carpet, and — and . . . ” She retreated behind her handkerchief, and, rising with difficulty, followed Mrs. Crane from the room.

Joanna did not ask them to remain. She watched them go, a novel sense of right mastering her nervousness, and dismay, and clamouring desire to beg their forgiveness. Her boldness frightened herself, until the glare of the furniture jumped at her eyes and inflamed her vexation. Then her determination strengthened. She must not yield to them. “You cannot sacrifice your own power and liberty merely to save your sisters’ feelings. You have your own sphere ; do first your duty to yourself,” Mr. Boas had said.

The words armed her against herself, and with a quiet bracing of will she stood at the window and watched the carriage sweep round the drive.

Then a sudden terrible fear possessed her.

What if every room in the house had been metamorphosed?

She sped from passage to hall, from attic to basement, and at length she sank down in the parlour exhausted, overpowered by relief.

All was right. Darkness, mahogany, and horsehair reigned in every other chamber.

CHAPTER VI.

THE APOTHEOSIS OF CHRISTINE.

SUMMER was at an end before Christine arrived at The Hatch. Joanna received her from Boas as a sacred trust, and brought her down to the house charged with such solemn responsibility that she at once frightened the girl into revolt against the arrangement Boas had made.

The house with its dampness and gloom repelled her, and her eyes darted about the hall like those of a caged bird. Joanna welcomed her kindly, if gravely, and led her over the house, unconsciously revealing its dulness and monotony. Christine's heart was bursting, but she set her lips and repressed all show of feeling.

She was honest in her desire for better things, and with the fear of Boas before her she looked about to see what could be made of this death in life he had devised for her. There was only one thing about the house that she liked — Mrs. Crane's drawing-room; and with a pang she saw the door of this room closed.

It was like a journey from Regent street to Gray's Inn road to go down to the housekeeper's room, where in dimness Mrs. Sykes sat like a human spider awaiting her victim.

"This is my little maid, Christine Dow," said Joanna, entering. "She will be in your charge, Mrs. Sykes, and I want you to teach her to sew and keep accounts, and make herself useful. She will help you with the preserves or any other light occupation. Good-bye, Christine. Be a good girl and do what Mrs. Sykes wishes."

She nodded to the girl and went out, thinking to get rid of the despairing eyes Christine had shown her. Her daring beauty was in eclipse; terror and protest sat on the pretty face that had caught Joanna's heart.

She went back to the parlour, but it was no longer restful. Everywhere she met reproachful eyes, and a mouth piteously drooped.

She walked up and down, struggling to repress the unhallowed craving for the girl's presence. She was so lonely, and it would be such a pleasure to have some one young and bright in the room.

But it would not do, she argued. However fascinating Christine might be, there was the decorum of rank and fitness to be observed. She could not be lifted at one step from slum to drawing-room.

Certainly not. Society forbade such outlawry and rebellion against its code of morals.

Yet, perversely, Joanna recollected a wider transportation once sanctioned, and "from the Cross to Paradise," chimed its approval of "from slum to drawing-room."

With Christine's presence at The Hatch Joanna's peace was at an end. She could settle to no occupation, and paced about the house, drawn always to the housekeeper's quarters, where the girl was, pale, silent, uncomplaining, but with eyes of misery that haunted her.

She could not get away from their dumb appeal. They allied themselves with the cry in her own heart for Christine's presence with her.

She was very lonely at this time, for her sisters showed their resentment of her independence by refusing to visit or be visited by her. Joanna had not explained their mistake. Indeed, Mrs. Crane's "an adopted daughter" rang in her ears, and united its appeal for Christine. Why should she not adopt her, and have the near and tender tie of a common life to unite them?

Christine's past, the hint of evil Boas had given her, did not deter her. Her purity made her face and forgive the sin less spotless women would have shunned and condemned. Evil

that would have roused their disgust had only touched her womanliness and pity. She claimed sisterhood with the fallen, and yearned to reach hands of help to them.

In Christine she saw not a sinner, but a victim — one whom poverty and circumstance had hounded to ruin. She had been chosen to help her, and she strengthened herself for the task.

But as the days went on she saw that the system she had chosen would not work.

Acquiescence on Christine's part became opposition. She hated Mrs. Sykes, and did not conceal her hatred, while the housekeeper's complaints became loud and frequent.

Joanna was called upon to interfere, but she could not bear the sight of the pale, hopeless girl who accepted her rebuke in silence. She would rather have struggled with the saucy, passionate girl of Mr. Boas's office. The state of things made her miserable; yet she feared to trust her own intuition of the right system for a nature like Christine's.

One night, in going to the room of one of the maids who was ill, a noise in the room which Christine occupied drew her attention.

She paused outside the door irresolutely, and then entered. Christine was in bed, shaking the bedstead with her sobbing. Joanna sat down beside her.

"Christine, my child, what are you grieving for?"

". . . not grieving," came from under the clothes.

"What is it, my dear? You are unhappy."

"That I am!" Christine exclaimed, vigorously springing up and disclosing a face swollen by tears. "I am worse than unhappy — I am — and I won't stand it any longer. I don't care what Mr. Boas says, I won't stay with that woman. You wouldn't if you was a girl. She would dry the juice in a growing apple with her ways. And to sit cooped up with her all day! Me that has been used to different ways! I'd a deal sooner be bad than like old Sykes. I'm off. I give you warning, for you have been good to me, and I like you. I'm going to run away to-morrow."

"Where will you go to, Christine?"

"Me? I don't care. To Nella and the rest, mebbe," she answered recklessly.

"And what will Mr. Boas say?"

The girl's face fell, and became dark and sullen.

"I don't know, and I don't care. He won't ever have any more to do with me; but I don't care."

She turned away her face to hide the tears she could not restrain; but those tears decided Joanna.

“Christine,” she said, “will you stay with me — live with me in my rooms, and be a little companion for me?”

The girl looked up sharply, the arrested tears glittering in her eyes. Mrs. Sykes had killed the ambitions she had cherished in Mr. Boas’s office; but at Joanna’s words they sprang into life again.

“Live with you? like a lady?” she cried.

“Yes, dear.”

“And have the servants wait on me?”

“Ye — yes, Christine.”

“And sit all day in the drawing-room?”

“Yes, if you wish to.”

“And have frocks like yours, and ride in the carriage?”

“Yes. You see, if you are to be my companion, you will do as I do. Will you try and make up your mind to stay?”

“Lor! I should just think I will — if only to spite old Sykes!”

Joanna almost laughed at the swift transition from despair to excited hope.

“But I don’t want you to stay for that motive, Christine,” she said, restraining her desire to laugh; she was so happy, poor soul, at the thought of saving Christine from going back to “Nella and the rest.” “I want you to learn to love what is good and beautiful.”

“And so I do — the flowers, and the trees, and the green lanes, and the birds ; only I could never get a sight of them for that old hussy.”

“But if you are free to go among them — will that make you happy and content ?”

“Mebbe. I’ll try it for a bit, anyway. And I won’t run away without giving you warning.”

Joanna put her arms round the girl and drew her to her. “Oh, my dear, I am a very lonely woman, and I love you. If you will only stay and try to love me a little.” . . .

For a long time there was silence. Then Christine caught Joanna’s hand and kissed it passionately.

“No one has loved me since father died. When you say you love me I could kiss your feet.”

The week that followed was one of mingled terror and delight to Joanna. The new arrangement had restored Christine to a softened resemblance of her old self ; and her daring, her humour, her beauty, were a constant feast to Joanna, who was yet tortured by distrust of the step she had taken.

The girl developed unexpected tricks of affection ; sudden bursts of sorrowful confidences, little dainty ways that took Joanna’s heart by storm.

Miss Traill began to forget her doubts of her

own wisdom, and gave herself up to the delight of being loved as this child loved her, with soft touch of hand, and gentle caressing fingers. But she checked the confidences. She shrank from hearing more of the girl's past, and saw no good to be gained by letting Christine dwell upon it.

"My dear," she said, "let us bury the past. *You* must remember it in order that it may help you to choose what is good ; but we who know your story, Mr. Boas and I, shall forget it. No one will ever hear of it from us."

It was easy enough for Joanna to forget Christine's past. In a little time she was not to be recognised as the wilful, passionate girl Boas had introduced to Miss Traill, or the sullen, despairing handmaid of Mrs. Sykes.

She was humble and tender, gay and charming, daring and shy, full of a hundred fascinations and contradictions. The delights of the country walks and drives with Joanna, sharpened by novelty, were enough to make her happy. She was charmed with her new position, and the largeness and liberality of it appealed to her luxurious tastes. The dainty appointments of the table, the fresh whiteness of the little bedroom to which she was moved, the adjustment of each day's occupation to her pleasure, touched her imagination.

She delighted in being waited on, and triumphed in secret over Mrs. Sykes, while she enjoyed Joanna's absorption in her. She was a clever little creature, and saw at once that she was the centre of Joanna's life, and the knowledge pleased her, and opened up endless vistas to her ambition.

The early days of liberty certainly did not bore her.

She danced over the house the first morning of her promotion, and spent an hour of rapt enjoyment arranging flowers in the drawing-room. So pleased was she that Joanna forgave her sisters their work when she saw Christine's delight in it.

Then she afterwards danced about the paddock like the veriest elf, and came in with her hair wreathed in autumn leaves to bring the sudden tears to Joanna's eyes.

Was it true? Could it be possible that this light-hearted child had known want and sin and shame? — the darkness of darkest London?

A week after she caught one of the horses and was riding him bare-backed round the field.

Joanna trembled with fright, and could scarcely totter to the doorstep from which her signals at last arrested Christine's mad career.

She sprang at once to the ground, and ran to Joanna with a pretty caressing touch.

"You are white and shivering; what frightened you?" she panted. "Goodness gracious! Did you think I was going to be beat by a stupid old horse like that?"

"But, my dear, how can you? Born and bred in London, how can you manage a horse? — and without a saddle!"

Christine laughed, enjoying Miss Traill's agitation.

"Bless you! it comes easy to me. My grandmother was a French circus-rider, and my mother rode in Sanger's Circus till she was married. I've got it from her, I expect. Lor! you should see me make a coster's donkey go riding to the Derby!"

Joanna fell back shocked. Then she pulled herself together. She must learn not to be startled by these things.

Christine stood looking up at her with bright eyes.

"You see it's quite safe. You'll let me go on riding Dobbin," she said eagerly.

Joanna shook her head, but seeing the cloud gather on the girl's face she added: "Not without a saddle. And Davis must go with you."

"Davis? Oh, he is the groom. He is a good-looking lot. And he *can* ride. Shall I go and call him?"

"No, dear, you must not ride Dobbin. We

have a pony out at grass. He is coming home next month, and you shall have him for your own, and ride him when you like."

"A pony! — for myself! Lor!"

Christine gasped and could not go on. Then her face drooped, and all the light passed from it.

"I hadn't ought to have it," she murmured. "I have been real mean. You mustn't give it me. I don't deserve it."

Joanna put her hand on her head, and looked tenderly into the shamed face.

"You will deserve it, Christine. All the best and noblest of life you will deserve, or try to deserve, won't you?"

Christine drew down the hand and hugged it to her bosom.

"Oh, I *wish* I was good," she cried earnestly. "Make me good like you and Mr. Boas."

The next day they drove to Sutton, and spent the morning shopping. Joanna had expected that her taste and Christine's would clash, but she was mistaken. The girl looked wistfully at the brave colours of red and blue, but was contented with the quiet tones Miss Traill preferred; while a simple hat amply compensated for the loss of the befeathered erection to which she had been attached. She had readily given up the hat, but nothing would induce her to part with her fringe.

These excitements, the fitting and bringing home of garments, sufficed for some weeks.

Then one day it rained.

Joanna was busy in the housekeeper's room with the week's accounts. She was pale and looked worried, for she and Christine had had a smart tussle on the subject of studies.

Miss Traill had been correcting some of the eccentricities of her speech, and had hinted at masters and regular lessons, and Christine had rebelled.

She had pouted and sulked and coaxed, until Joanna, for peace' sake, had waived the subject, and had gone to seek a calmer atmosphere in Mrs. Sykes's domains. Christine, left to herself, wandered in and out of the rooms and flattened her nose on the window in a disconsolate outlook.

The rain came down with a dismal and persistent monotony that aggravated her. She felt nothing of the pathos and beauty of autumn rain, and to her it was only an enemy shutting her off from the outdoor world that she loved, and that alone kept her contented in the monotony of *The Hatch*. She strummed on the window and tapped her foot impatiently.

How she hated the gloomy day!

Her eyes wandered into the room. The scene there was still more gloomy. Pictures and

books and furniture — all were encased in shadow. A desperate longing rose in her for the stir and bustle of London streets, and her brows knit over a sudden thought. Gentility had begun to pall on her. Respectability, she was finding, had its responsibilities. Why not escape from this deadly dulness back again to the old vivid life? The daring of the idea charmed her, but only for a moment. She had not exhausted the delights of *The Hatch*, and her soul loathed now more than ever the foulness and sin from which she had come.

Besides, the pony was to be hers next week. No, she would not run away, but she must have amusement somehow.

She walked to the bookcase and found a book. It was a novel, light and sensational enough to occupy an hour passably, even for her.

She seated herself in the window and read; but after a time the occupation palled.

With a sigh of disgust she threw the book from her and sprang to her feet.

She would go to the stables and talk to Davis.

Her eyes danced wickedly as she pictured Miss Traill's horror of such an escapade.

She wanted to shock her; she had not forgiven her for proposing lessons for her, who had been a finished scholar and quite a lady in the slums — whose father had been a schoolmaster.

Yes; certainly it would be some fun to go and talk to the groom.

She slipped from the house and ran swiftly along the damp, moss-grown path to the stables, where Davis sat whistling as he cleaned the harness.

He was a steady man, who had been in Colonel Smedley's employ since his boyhood. Joanna had always liked him, and had been glad to retain him as coachman after her uncle's death.

He had a more than ordinary share of good looks; and Christine, tired of her sex and longing for change, had once or twice attempted a conversation with him. But her efforts had not been successful. Davis knew his place too well to talk familiarly with his mistress's *protégée*.

He had his own ideas as to her style and breeding, and had freely discussed her with the other servants, who one and all resented the change in her fortunes, and were agreed that she was not a lady, and was making a fool of the missus.

He answered her questions grudgingly; and finding no amusement in her adventure, Christine made up her mind to return to the house. Unfortunately, just then she saw Miss Traill hurrying towards her along the garden-path.

In thoughtless mischief the girl determined to shock her; and she kept her seat, talking with easy familiarity to the man.

When she saw that Joanna was really distressed she regretted having done it; but yet her eyes danced with fun when she followed her into the house.

Joanna showed her displeasure by keeping silence for a time.

"It is not considered dignified for a lady to show a preference for the groom's society," she said at last.

"I ain't a lady," said Christine defiantly.

"If you are to live with me, you must behave like one," Joanna answered bravely, meeting the eyes that blazed at her remark.

But she was perturbed. And a few words afterwards from Mrs. Sykes, who naturally resented Christine's transference to the parlour, did not lessen her uneasiness.

"And, indeed, ma'am, Davis is quite glad you saw Miss Dow talking to him to-day. I am the last person who would speak against any one you took up, ma'am; but, indeed, ma'am, I had it from Jane, as how missie makes eyes to Davis that awful — and him a respectable man, for all he's so gentlemanly."

The words fermented in Joanna's mind.

Christine was sullen and wilful, smarting

under a sense of wrong-doing, yet too proud to confess it. She was rude and insolent to Joanna, and told her she had made up her mind to run away; and, nervously in terror lest she should mean the threat, Joanna telegraphed to Mr. Boas to come to her help.

She felt she could not struggle unaided against the old Adam in Christine, and was miserable until his reply reached her.

She opened his telegram with trembling fingers, but the fear passed from her face when she read it.

“Will dine with you at seven. Bringing a friend. — Boas.” The words lifted a weight from her mind. She was calm immediately, and felt herself equal to battling alone with a thousand Adams, old or new.

Now that Boas was coming she saw that she had been cowardly to appeal to him at the first difficulty with her charge, and she would have sent to stop him from coming, but the fear of seeming inhospitable withheld her.

Yet it was natural that she should not at once gain the self-confidence necessary for her position. She had so long leaned on her sisters that she still needed a crutch.

And to lean on Mr. Boas added dignity to her helplessness. The thought of seeing him that evening brought a tinge of excitement to her

cheeks. Her agitation concerning the girl subsided, and with an eager air she went in search of her. Meanwhile penitence had been leavening the lump of Christine's wickedness. She hated to be away from Joanna, to see the triumphant looks of Mrs. Sykes and the housemaid, to know that she was in disgrace.

Her two hours' isolation had given her time for thought, and she was reproaching herself for the anxiety she was causing Miss Traill. Also she was not certain what strain Joanna's good nature might bear; and, in spite of her threat, she did not want to be sent back to town without trying the pony.

Above all, she was afraid of Mr. Boas. If she were sent from The Hatch she dared not face him again. She knew well enough that would alienate his interest, and she cared too much for his good opinion to run the risk of losing it for ever.

So when Joanna came into the drawing-room, she found Christine huddled up on the carpet, clinging to the leg of a Louis Quatorze chair, and weeping dismally.

"My dear! Christine, what is it?" quavered the lady.

The girl's quick wits at once recognised the absence of reproach from the voice. She had nothing to fear.

A short time before she would have taken advantage of such a state of things; but a latent nobility in her had been vitalised by contact with Joanna, and she made no attempt to pursue her advantage.

"I am sorry I was a bad lot," she said. "You'd be in your rights if you had me away for it."

The ready tears sprang to Joanna's eyes. She so easily responded to penitence and humility; and the girl's bedraggled grief tugged at her tenderest compassion.

In another moment Christine was forgiven, and Joanna had found that it needed only love to conquer her.

After they had cried together and nullified the future with promises of mutual help, she told her to go and change her gown, as Mr. Boas was coming to dinner.

The words transformed the humble penitent. At once she was a different girl — radiant, flushed, transfigured.

"Mr. Boas coming to dinner? Lor!" she gasped, her face dimpled with smiles.

"Christine, you promised you would not say 'lor.'"

"So I did; I forgot. Oh, my eyes! — will that do?"

"No, my dear. You must learn to speak

without using exclamations. Such things as ‘*lor*’ and ‘*oh, my eyes*’ are vulgar.”

Joanna blushed as she administered the mild reproof.

“I’ll remember,” said Christine quickly; “and I’ve got to put on a new frock — the fawn one?”

“Yes; and will you be very careful to be quiet and gentle to-night, dear? I should like Mr. Boas to see how well you can conduct yourself. And he is bringing a friend.” . . .

“Two of ‘em. Lor! No; I don’t mean that! . . . Whatever will Mr. Boas think to have me sitting at table with him? He told me I was coming here to be your maid; he’ll say I’m not in my place.”

Christine’s face fell, and she looked inquiringly at Joanna.

“If you show him that you are a lady he will have no reason for thinking you out of your place,” said Miss Traill.

“I’ll show him!” said Christine, brightening and nodding her head wisely. “My! you wouldn’t guess but I’d been brought up to it. When I get on that frock I’ll show you!”

She darted from the room, and Joanna for an hour afterwards heard her singing as she moved about her bedroom.

A great burden had been lifted from that lady's mind.

Christine was so amenable, and responded so easily to good influences, that she was no longer afraid of not being able to control her. And she had an old-fashioned belief in the assistance of another power that strengthened her own weakness.

It comforted her to remember that though Christine hated anything approaching a lay sermon, she did not refuse to listen to her own timid references to higher things.

She prepared for her guests with a happy little bustle that soon removed the traces of tears. But for the first time in her life she was dissatisfied with her appearance.

She had never before given a thought to her dress. Now she discovered that the gown she wore, Mrs. Crane's choice, was ugly and middle-aged.

The black silk fitted her with cruel exactness, and showed her angular outlines with uncompromising severity.

The square at the neck was finished by a jet embroidery that made the face above it hard and cold and colourless. There was no softness about her, and Joanna, vaguely conscious of a want, threw a lace shawl across her shoulders—a fatal act that stamped “old maid” on her

whole appearance. "It is no use fighting against it," she thought meekly to herself. "I am not young — I am only a plain, middle-aged woman." But she sighed as she turned from the glass.

Then her face changed at the sight of Christine in the doorway, and she forgot her own disadvantages in pleasure at the girl's appearance.

The simple gown had transformed Christine into a dainty child. She stood shyly under Miss Traill's scrutiny, her eyes big with excitement; and Joanna studied her from head to foot, and was well satisfied.

She had brushed out her elaborate fringe, and the hair waved naturally from her forehead, making the face more childlike and refined.

Her dress fell in straight folds from her waist, and she had fastened a spray of copper-beech in her belt — a detail that gave character to the whole costume.

"Do you think he will think I look nice?" she asked artlessly.

"I am sure he will," said Joanna. And with the words a pang shot through her, a cry for her own vanished youth.

"I am glad," said Christine frankly, in turn scrutinising Joanna. She tipped her head on one side and pondered before she spoke again.

"Why do you wear that shawl? Is that the way at dinner?"

"No ; but my dress wanted some relief. It is too severe."

"So it is ; but that is not right. Please let me. Where's a pin?"

While she spoke she had taken off the shawl, and now, with her mouth full of pins, she was on tiptoe, draping the lace on Joanna. With a few deft touches she made it hang gracefully on bodice and skirt.

"Now a needle and thread," she cried. "And now you want a band. Ah! the very thing."

She had seen an antique silver belt of Moorish work on the table, and she clasped it round Joanna's waist.

The effect was excellent.

"But the jet is too stiff. Have you some narrow lace, Miss Traill?"

Joanna found some for her, and in five minutes Christine had made a full ruche of lace to replace the jet, and had outlined the neck in soft shadow that made the face younger and fresher.

"You are lovely," she said when she had finished. "But wait, please. Don't look at yourself till I come."

She sped away, returning with a bunch of scarlet geraniums, which she pinned in the bodice, and then bade Joanna look in the glass.

Miss Traill did not recognise herself there.

The angles and leanness of her figure had disappeared with the hard surface of the silk. The belt outlined a waist still young and round, and the face with its light of pleasure and excitement was distinctly good to look at.

She was no longer a grim and unrelenting spinster, but a woman with undreamed-of treasures of feeling dimly shadowed in her face.

She blushed at the reflection of herself.

“What a clever little woman you are, Christine. Who taught you to do this?”

The girl shrugged her shoulders in a little foreign fashion. “I never was taught—it seems to come natural. My grandmother was a French woman. Please come down-stairs if you are ready. I want you to show me how to be a lady before he comes.”

When Mr. Boas arrived he raised his eyebrows at the sight of Christine in The Hatch drawing-room—a young woman of consequence, the equal of Miss Traill. But he made no other sign of his astonishment at the transformation Joanna had effected in so short a time.

He introduced his friend Amos Bevan, a journalist and author. “I had asked him to dine with me, so I was obliged to bring him or disappoint you,” he explained to his hostess.

Joanna was charmed. She had of course heard of Mr. Bevan, and always took up one of his books when she was specially in need of refreshing.

Boas stared at her, wondering what had called him down to The Hatch ; wondering if that was the woman who three months ago had been fluttered if he glanced at her. He stared more than once during the evening.

“Heavens ! how that little witch has brightened her up,” he thought. “She was a dowdy old maid when I met her at Croydon. Now she is actually good-looking. She has some grit in her too, and is quite the lady of the house. As for Christine—h’m . . . Well, I doubt the wisdom of dressing her up and putting ideas into her silly little head ; but it may be the only way to save her. And a confoundedly pleasant way to be saved it is ! After all, we must judge systems by their results, and Miss Traill’s system seems to have been more than successful. The girl is quite to the manner born. What a clever little minx it is !”

During dinner he studied Christine, and was forced to admire the tact with which she adapted herself to her position.

She furtively copied Joanna’s movements, and went through the meal’s routine without committing any open blunder.

Her conversation she wisely restricted to monosyllables, but she made great play with her glances, and her animated face showed such intelligent interest in the subjects discussed that the man introduced as Amos Bevan, silent himself, never noticed her silence.

He was a Scotsman, shy and reserved, strange as yet to Southern ways, but one of the most active of Boas's coadjutors; and Joanna and the two men forgot their dinner in a discussion of the needs and condition of the new democracy. She had been reading up the subject, and was primed with information and suggestion.

As the meal went on Boas began to look at her with respect. He even deferred to her opinion on a mooted point, but she was so flattered by the deference that she became conscious of herself, grew nervous, faltered, and made him doubtful of the truth of his altered judgment.

Her confusion forced him into an argument with Bevan on the cultivation of turnips, of which he knew nothing. His opponent recognised this and withdrew, leaving the victory to him.

Boas, with a laugh, acknowledged himself beaten.

After that he was convinced that Miss Traill was a quite uninteresting person.

If he had not felt responsible for Christine, and under some obligation to his hostess, the interval between the discussion and the sweets would have bored him not a little.

Half an hour afterwards Joanna reinstated herself in his good opinion.

They were in the drawing-room ; a very silent party. Mr. Bevan sat mute, his eyes on the carpet, Joanna making herculean efforts to talk to him.

Boas was lounging lazily in a chair, giving himself up to the weariness that had possessed him all day.

Suddenly he put out his hand and touched Christine who was near to him.

“Child, go and play something for me.”

“I — I can’t play the piano,” she stammered, reddening with vexation.

“No, of course ; I forgot. It doesn’t matter, only I’m tired, and music always rests me.”

He turned away and covered his eyes with his hand.

Christine was humiliated. She hung her head ; and Bevan, who saw everything while appearing to see nothing, roused himself to remove her pique.

“Music is a gift by itself. Some who can’t play are able to draw. Perhaps you are an artist, Miss Dow ?”

"No," she said, her eyes flashing defiantly; "I can't sing, or play, or draw, or — or nothing."

The young man subsided into silence, and Joanna broke the awkward pause.

"Shall I give you some music, Mr. Boas?"

She crossed to the piano and began to play one of Grieg's quaint melodies, from which she glided into a song of Leo Delibes'. Her voice was not strong, but it was clear and true and sweet, and was the expression of her ideal self.

Bevan twisted round sharply on his chair; his face became eager, his eyes wistful; and forgetting Christine, he turned his back on her, and gave his whole attention to the music.

The lines cleared from Boas's forehead; his face softened under the influence of Joanna's music, and when she stopped there was an instant appeal from the two men that she should go on. She sang and played for an hour, and in that hour Christine sat shrinking into herself, learning her insignificance.

By and by she could not suppress her tears; but no one noticed her mortification, or saw that she was crying.

The bitterness of reality took hold upon her. She had imagined such happiness in meeting Mr. Boas again, in letting him see her altered position, her new frock. And it had ended in

nothing. He had given her less attention than when she was a poor girl struggling with evil.

The handsome, tall stranger had scarcely looked at her.

Both men had listened to Miss Traill when she talked at dinner, and now they were giving all their attention to her music.

Her ignorant little soul began to understand that it is not enough to be pretty and young and well-dressed. A woman must be more than this to hold the interest of men like Mr. Boas and Amos Bevan.

A sob caught in her throat, and this time Boas put out a sudden hand and laid it over her fingers.

That was all; but it made the inconsequent child radiantly happy.

When the music ceased he got up and proposed that Joanna should walk with him round the garden.

She hesitated a moment. The rain had long since ceased; but the evening was chill, and the paths were damp after the rain.

Then she brought a wrap, and without a word led him out into the garden.

The smell of the earth after rain enfolded them as they walked up and down; but the air was heavy with moisture, and the keenness of late autumn was about them. The impene-

trable gloom of The Hatch shadowed Joanna's content.

"What did the telegram mean?" Boas asked. "Have you had trouble with her?"

"Yes," said Joanna, and gave him the history of the day.

He listened, biting his moustache. When she had finished he looked up.

"The place is too quiet. She won't settle, after the novelty has worn off, if she is not diverted from herself. Pity she can't have young people about her. And old fogies like Bevan and myself are not the thing either. It's difficult to say what *is* the thing. Anyway, the first course in her salvation is amusement. Take her about. Show her the bright side of life; keep her occupied till the town has ceased to draw her. Then begin the moral education — eh?"

"Yes," said Joanna. "She is so loving and lovable I have every hope" —

"So have I, after seeing how much you have done already. But you are not working on orthodox lines, remember. . . . What a grand old place you have here. You must let me come down sometimes — it will rest me to hear your music and walk in the garden. I get none of these 'unities' in town. . . . Listen. . . . The girl only wants cheering up, you see."

Through the open window came the sound of a merry little laugh. Bevan, at his wits' end for conversation, had been beguiled into a proposal that he should give Christine riding lessons.

“And may I have lessons in music and reading?” she said to Joanna, when the men had gone.

CHAPTER VII.

A RING OF SMOKE.

AMOS BEVAN was one of the best known of the younger journalists. He had come to town with the odour of peat and heather clinging to him, and had brought a whiff of the Scottish moorland to the jaded senses of the London public.

There was something fresh and wholesome in his articles. They speedily became the vogue, and when he issued a volume of sketches, em-purpled with life, yet clear as cairngorms, and glittering with humour and pathos, his success was assured.

The tall, somewhat uncouth, yet handsome Scotsman had set his stamp on the times.

He was not a social creature, however. In his native town he had been known as "a dowie chield," caring more for books than sports, shy of men and women.

In London he was equally reserved and silent, and if by a rare chance he was beguiled to any social function he was seen only, not heard. He was enthusiastic on social questions, but

was too diffident or too lazy to take a public share in them. He and Boas were extremely friendly, working in pairs when practicable.

They were both busy men, but they spared one evening a week for each other, and it was this evening they had sacrificed to Joanna and her *protégée*.

Back again in Boas's rooms, Bevan sat steadily smoking; sending up rings from his pipe with a success that maddened Boas, whose happiness in life depended just now on his emitting a perfect round from his cherry-wood bowl.

"You can't do it, you know, old man," Bevan drawled, suddenly breaking silence; "your genius doesn't lie in circles."

"I'll do it yet," said Boas.

They smoked on for half an hour.

"Confound it!" Boas exclaimed, and threw his pipe across the room. Bevan looked up, sadness in his eyes.

"You can't do it, you know. You are too impulsive. Tobacco is like a woman — it must be wooed cannily. Sorry you didn't succeed, though. I owe you the best evening I have spent since I came south. I shouldn't have taken it ill to-night if you had managed the ring."

"I thought the house, the dinner, the whole thing bored you."

“No, I liked it well enough. I liked the old house, and the dim rooms, barring that shrieking drawing-room, and the quaint, earnest-like body they belong to. And when she sang . . . man, it was fine! The gloaming, and the music, and the smell of the rain, and the lassie greeting in the corner—they were better than any swell At Home, and minded me of Scotland.”

“I thought you didn’t like women?”

“I don’t. But these are different from most I have met. Miss Traill is a sensible body and has convictions about property and all that; and the girl was as unconventional and honest as a Scotch lassie.”

“H’m,” Boas grunted. Then, after a pause, half to himself, “She won’t like that life long. She wants young society, and can’t have it. She’ll rebel when she gets tired of the luxury. If something isn’t done she’ll run away. She was crying too. . . .” Bevan took no notice of the soliloquy. Through his half-closed lids he was watching a smoke-ring grow thin, and finally dissolve.

“How did the girl strike you?” said Boas, after a time, looking at him keenly.

“Oh, I don’t know. All women are the same. She seemed like her sex, all eyes and tongue; only she made me promise to do a thing I don’t

want to, which was clever of her. And, confound my idiocy! I am going to ride with her next week."

"Well, don't go too far with her," said Boas.

"Not I. By the way, what is the relationship between those two?"

"None; Christine is an orphan, poor and friendless. Miss Traill has taken her in and befriended her. It's a curious thing to see them together in that lonely old house. Reminds me of an experiment I want to make some day. I wonder what you would say to it? Suppose I take a girl who has fallen — one of the better class — fairly educated, naturally refined, passionate, strong-willed. Well, I transport her into a life like that, put her in Christine's place, for instance; what do you think would result?"

"She'd demoralise the butler, and run away with the spoons."

"My good fellow, I'm not joking. Seriously, would it answer?"

"No; for one thing the quiet wouldn't suit her; for another — well, I don't think a woman once polluted would ever be clean, no matter where you put her."

"I don't agree with you; but I am not talking of a woman, but of a girl — a child, say, like Christine — young, betrayed. Would there be any hope of her?"

“Possibly, if she were of Miss Dow’s temperament — not unless.”

“And what is Miss Dow’s temperament?”

“Sensitive, artistic, readily open to new influences, susceptible to culture and refinement. Plenty of backbone, yet led by a glance where she loves. Frivolous, perhaps, but a nice, tender little thing, who only needs the guidance of a strong will to be everything that woman should be.”

“H’m; you seem to have studied the young woman pretty thoroughly.”

“I never study anything but the carpet,” said Bevan mildly.

Boas shut his eyes and leaned back, strumming on the arm of his chair a recollection of Joanna’s song. Presently he roused himself, and continued aloud his train of thought.

“Yes, it’s a queer world. The man plunges the woman into a sink of iniquity, and holds her there while he screams for purity. The women are as bad — most of ’em. ‘Keep her there,’ they say, ‘lest she pollute us.’ I tell you, it’s this attitude of men and women towards the fallen that prevents their redemption. Here and there, thank God! you find a woman that can bring her own innocence and love to the help of her sisters; but the majority fear to offer the drink of water lest their crystal purity break in the offering.

"And they are quite right. If they mix themselves up with the evil round them, how are they to keep their innocence?"

"Hang it, man! Ignorance and innocence are not the same thing! And if they were, is innocence a higher virtue than knowledge? Is a woman wise to endure and serve a less noble creation than the white soul of a baby? Talk of innocence! There's Miss Traill, a woman knowing good and evil, with a soul as pure as on the day she was born."

"Yet you wouldn't compare a woman knowing evil with an innocent child like that we saw to-night, would you? If I had to choose between the two kinds of innocence give me the child's," Bevan said, lazily knocking the ashes from his pipe.

"Compare her?—no!" Boas ejaculated with a queer smile. "Have you any reason for asking?"

"Only to assure myself that your hobby hadn't got the reins in his mouth and ran away with you. And, by Jove! I've promised to ride with her on Wednesday."

The next Wednesday Bevan went down to Sutton to give Christine her first lesson in riding. But she was already at home in the saddle, having spent a good many hours in riding the pony, which had been sent home on the Monday.

When Bevan arrived he found she was already a practised horse-woman, and there was little left for him to teach her. The afternoon passed in a fashion infinitely agreeable to his taste.

Christine apparently did not expect him to talk, and was herself too shy and too much absorbed in the pony for conversation. When they got among the fresh breezes on Banstead Downs he asked permission to smoke, and, cigar in mouth, he occupied himself with his thoughts and let the girl ride where she would.

So it happened that he came back to The Hatch pleased with the excursion, his companion, and himself.

Joanna had tea ready for them in her own little parlour.

He accepted a cup from her, and afterwards threw himself into a big chair, and smoked luxuriously while the two women chatted.

They did not lure him into the conversation. Christine was all excited description, and Joanna was content to listen to her and to know that she was happy.

Bevan stayed as long as he decently could. Then he got up, and, bending his sad eyes on Joanna, asked permission to take Christine for another ride the following Wednesday.

Joanna hesitated, and looked doubtfully from him to the girl before she spoke. Bevan, seeing

her hesitation, put it as a favour to himself, and Joanna could not refuse. But she determined to ask Boas, before she gave permission another time.

“Thank you very much,” said Bevan; “I shall look forward to next Wednesday then.” After which he rode home swearing at his confounded good-nature.

While the autumn lasted this ride made itself a weekly event. Boas, far from objecting, heartily encouraged it; and Bevan, who allowed himself no other relaxation, justified the arrangement by the excuse of necessary exercise.

Under his tuition Christine became an expert as well as a fearless horsewoman. She leaped gates and managed her pony in a manner that stirred a latent pride in his heart.

He seldom talked to her. Davis, riding behind, was scarcely more silent than he; but it was pleasant to look down at the happy, flower-like face; and he liked to be consulted, as Christine consulted him, on every subject under the sun, not even excepting toilets.

Bevan learned to decide with a serious face on the advantages of silk over muslin, and of blue over brown.

Yet it seemed to him that he still preferred not to talk during the rides. It was, for the most part, a one-sided conversation; but he

never felt that her chatter intruded on his thoughts. Nay, it was certain that his favourite tobacco was less satisfactory when the smoke did not wreath about the confidences of his little friend.

That was what he called her now. And, because friendship demands something of sacrifice, he submitted to spend long afternoons giving her the tuition she did not need.

Joanna welcomed him always.

The riding lessons were excuse sufficient for his presence, and it was ridiculous to suspect any other motive in the indifferent man who always looked bored, smoked in silence, and in silence went his way.

When the winter came Bevan's visits ceased entirely, and the ladies of The Hatch only heard of him occasionally through Boas. Joanna's mind was at rest. Christine was content, and did not seem to miss her cavalier. He kept silence through the spring, but one day in June he suddenly appeared — "to ride with Miss Christine," he said. After that they fell into the old habit of a weekly ride, and, seeing the casual nature of their intercourse, Joanna could not object to the arrangement.

Boas looked on with amusement. "If Bevan keeps Christine from *ennui* it is a good thing," he said, recklessly. He knew Bevan well; he did not fear complications.

He was delighted to hear from Joanna that the girl had settled down — was studying diligently, and making rapid progress in everything. “She is the greatest comfort to me,” Joanna wrote to him; “I cannot sufficiently thank you for giving me such pleasant work as this of training Christine.”

She often wrote to Boas now.

Few days passed without his sending her a letter — begging letters they were — in which he asked advice, clothes, money, house-room for his *protégées*, suggestion.

There was little for which he did not ask her, and she met his demands royally, until at last he came to look upon her as an embodied Providence, and to treat her with that taken-for-granted indifference which is the attitude usually adopted towards Providence.

Womanlike, Joanna was pleased to be so treated.

Her life and aims, directed by him, blossomed out in every direction. Her days were full of zest. Christine touched them on the human side, supplying all they needed of love; Boas lifted them into the divine, crowning them with faith and hope.

The change in her was a marvel to her sisters. They had not been at The Hatch since the day when Joanna had asserted her independence, but

a reconciliation had been patched up between them. Joanna was too happy to be revengeful. She had called on her sisters, but they refused to visit her, and only tolerated her presence at their homes.

Truth to tell, she did little to persuade them to renew their intercourse with her. A great weight had been lifted from her life when they ceased to supervise her affairs ; and, conscious that they would disapprove of her work with Boas, she was relieved rather than otherwise at their absence.

Besides — though Joanna did not confess this, even to herself — she dreaded their interference with her friendship for him ; and she was quite content to keep them at a distance from The Hatch.

She would not invite them to go down, and neither of the two would suffer the humiliation of returning uninvited to the house.

Mrs. Prothero, who had a real affection for her sister, might have forgotten her pique at seeing her own children set aside for a stranger, and might have renewed cordial relations had she not been forbidden to do so by “Fergus.” So Joanna was left untroubled by her relatives. Eighteen months before, such a state of things would have broken her heart. It astonished her now to see that new interests, new work, new

hopes, had cut her adrift from her past dependence on them. The love of Christine, the friendship of Boas, had caused her to forget the sisters, who had once been her only tie to life.

She was growing anxious to present the girl to them — to show them that her absorption in her *protégée* was excusable.

Christine was indeed becoming a charming girl. Her three years with Miss Traill had developed all the latent good in her. Her high spirits had been toned down to Joanna's need of quiet and gentleness.

Out-of-doors and away from Joanna she might be still hoydenish and loud; inside the four walls of The Hatch her gaiety and spirit were seldom over-obtrusive. She was an apt and docile pupil; and it was amusing to see her adaptation of Joanna's somewhat precise manner. It gave a quaint touch to the girl's brilliant personality and supplied the charm of the unexpected.

Christine often surprised the people whom she met. She had not forgotten her cockney accent; and, when excited, she lost control of her grammar. But her piquant beauty and undoubted refinement made strangers explain such lapses to their own satisfaction, and in no way to her detriment.

Miss Traill's pretty little friend was charmingly original, they said. Joanna had early

seen the necessity of change and amusement for Christine, and had several times taken her to places likely to interest her. Brighton and Scarboro', Harrogate and Edinburgh had brought their influences to bear on the girl's education. But the little Philistine found nothing in Edinburgh to please her except the thought that Bevan had lived and studied there.

These excursions were the only occasions on which Christine mixed with the outside world. She was never introduced to any of the infrequent callers at The Hatch, among whom she bore the nebulous designation, "Miss Traill's Companion." Joanna would have been indignant had she known that in Sutton circles her sole claim to regard — apart from her wealth — as a "civilised" woman rested on the orthodox way in which she ignored and suppressed her companion.

Christine knew nothing of this. She was now always occupied with her studies. She was taking lessons in music, and had developed a fresh young voice that might have made Joanna jealous had she not been too full of pride in the girl's redemption to be capable of any lower feeling.

Joanna had been afraid to let her ward go to London, so Christine's masters came down to The Hatch every week, and the echoes of the life she had left ceased to sound in her ears.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLYMPIA.

It must not be inferred from the preceding chapter that the old Adam in Christine was dead and finally buried.

As the months went on, now and then she had days of his resurrection, that wore Joanna into a pale and trembling shadow of her hopeful, happy self; days in which a mad longing for her old life would seize the girl, and she would strain at her fetters and struggle to get back into the irresponsible past.

When these fits seized her Joanna was powerless. She could only sit with clasped hands, praying that the devil might be cast out of the child. She distrusted herself, but she trusted Christine, and did not send again for Boas.

And when the force of the temptation was at its worst Christine would mount the pony and career wildly over the downs, returning with spent strength and humble face to be loved and wept over and forgiven.

It was a discipline that strengthened the meek, while it tamed the fiery soul.

Bevan arrived in the midst of one of these moods, a year after the rides had been first inaugurated.

Christine mounted in furious silence; but, affecting not to notice her stormy face, he took the lead and cantered away down the drive.

In another moment she was after him, had flown past him like the wind, leaped the gate, and was rushing madly along the highway. Then ensued a break-neck gallop, until at last, covered with foam and breathless, the horses slackened pace on the hill-top.

Bevan smiled across at Christine.

"That was well done. You did your part finely. May I have a cigar as a reward for not beating you?"

She did not answer, and he saw that her lips trembled. "I've had a new post offered to me," he went on quietly. "I want to consult you about it. Do you know 'Our Own Correspondent' in *The Northern Light*?"

Christine looked straight before her and did not answer.

"Well, I'm that individual; and I want to ask you—Miss Christine, you are not listening."

"No; I don't want to listen."

"What do you want to do, then?"

"To get away—out of this life. It is killing

me. Oh, you don't know what it is; this dull old house, and Miss Traill never vexed, never anything but good. If she would only get into a rage sometimes—and in my heart I have such a craving for something different. I think sometimes my heart will burst with the life that I have to hold down and keep under. Are all girls like that? Do they all feel the hungry gnawing that I feel? And I sit quietly and strum scales or make stupid drawings—I, with my heart bursting! And they call it life. I feel like a fly with its wings torn off.”

Passion coloured the words and painted the picture before Bevan.

He kept his glance from her face, but he knew that it was hot and trembling, and that there were tears in the rebellious eyes.

“But there are pleasant things,” he said aimlessly.

“Pleasant things? Ah, much you know about it! Can't you see that they are not living—they don't make me *feel*? All the time there is something beating in me that ordinary things don't touch. Oh, I *wish* I could tell you what it is! But I don't know how to put it in words. I can't even tell myself. But I never have any real pleasure—only on Wednesdays now, when you come. If it wasn't for you and the pony, I should run away. There! . . . And

now you will think me an ungrateful lot, but I ain't — am not, I mean."

"That's a good sign," murmured Bevan. "Emotion under grammatical control does not end in complete revolt."

"You are making game of me," panted Christine.

"My good lassie, not I. No, no. I was thinking you and I might combine to fight monotony. Would you like a trip to town — the Moore and Burgess Minstrels or the Egyptian Hall?"

"Oh, would you?" Christine exclaimed eagerly.

He smiled at the sudden transition from passionate despair.

"It might be done. We'll ask Miss Traill. Next week?"

"To-morrow," she commanded.

"Well, I had an engagement. But no matter. To-morrow, then. Is it to be Maskelyne and Cook's?"

"I don't know. I was never anywhere but in a music-hall."

He raised his eyebrows, but he had learned to accept the unexpected equably.

"Well, we can arrange that afterwards. That's settled. Existence looking more rosy, eh?"

She pouted her lips, but her face was brighter, and in a little while she was her own radiant self. Bevan had exorcised the evil spirit, and under his quiet demeanour was absurdly satisfied with his success.

He was flattered, too, at finding that his visits gave her pleasure; and the words, "I only have pleasure when you come," became the measuring rod of the happiness they afforded him.

She was a piquant morsel for assimilation, he thought. Her unconventionality, her spirit, her humour, her contradictions, her slang, even her lapses into bad grammar and worse taste, flavoured the dish for his palate.

She was a riddle to guess, and she baffled his intellect; a bird to wing, and she flew beyond his range.

He was aware that the puzzle lured his mind.

He had some difficulty in persuading Joanna to consent to the expedition to town, and she looked doubtfully at Christine before she agreed to it.

It was only two years since the girl had been swimming in the dangerous currents, and she questioned the wisdom of allowing her to go so near the whirlpool of city life.

What if she were drawn into the vortex as a consequence of this visit?

But a glance at Christine's face solved the difficulty. The responsibility of taming her wild spirit had taught Joanna wisdom. Intuition, so long repressed, was now her guide; and where it would have failed, love for her ward and comprehension of her struggle led her unerringly to the right course.

She knew that the monotony of The Hatch was trying for her, and she had taken her to seaside places and into the country; but she had not thought it wise to allow her to go to town.

Now she could not resist the appeal in the eager face. Christine had been restless for some days past, and Joanna saw that it would be truer wisdom to yield to her than to oppose her.

So she gave her consent, and promised to be at Victoria Station with Christine at two o'clock the next day. Bevan was to meet them there and escort them to the Egyptian Hall. Joanna also wrote a note to Boas asking him to join them. Everything fell out as arranged. Bevan met them at the station, and they took a 'bus to Piccadilly-circus, from which point it was only a step to Maskelyne and Cook's.

They went along, Christine all excitement; Bevan looking at her with shy pleasure in her happiness.

Suddenly Joanna felt a hand on her arm, and turned, startled to see Boas.

"Excuse me," he said, "I was just on the way to meet you. Your note was a godsend, for you are the very person I need. A godsend to meet you in town. I want you to come with me now."

Joanna hesitated at Boas's question.

"Christine is with me, you see, and Mr. Bevan. We were going to Maskelyne's" —

"I know, but never mind that. This case can't wait. Bevan will look after Christine, and see her home. The young people can take care of themselves without us, eh?"

Joanna murmured something, and Boas shrugged his shoulders at the word *chaperon*.

"My good soul, neither of them knows what that means. I assure you she is as safe with Bevan as with you. *I* want you — A woman down here. You can help her if any one can. We are stopping the traffic. . . . Take my arm. . . . Mind you, look after that child," he shouted to Bevan.

He and Christine turned to see Joanna borne off by the irresistible Boas. They looked at each other and laughed.

"A cool fellow, 'pon my word," said Bevan.

"He wouldn't have got me so easily," said Christine, tossing her head.

“No? I thought he could do anything with you.”

“Well, once. But I’ve learned better. I used to think all the world of him, but now” —

“Well?”

Bevan did not know how eagerly his eyes were importuning for the end of the sentence.

“Oh, he’s all on wires; never still. I like a quiet man, who will be silent and” —

“Let you talk?”

She laughed and nodded; and, looking down, he met a glance under the long lashes that was certainly the prettiest thing he had ever seen.

He drew a long breath.

“Are you happy? Does this please you?”

“I should just think it does. I feel free — out of my cage” — her bosom expanded. “It is like being on the downs with you; no one in all the world but the two of us. Oh, Mr. Bevan” —

“Well?”

They had arrived at the hall, and her disappointed eyes ranged round the unpromising entrance, where a few people were waiting to book seats.

“This doesn’t look a bit nice. Do you want to go in very badly?”

“Not at all. I am at your service. My wishes correspond with yours.”

“Our own correspondent?”

“Yours only.”

The daring of this speech almost frightened him; but she only laughed again.

“Then will you do what I want?”

She sunk her voice, sidled close to him, and began coaxingly: “Mr. Bevan.”

“Yes?”

He smiled into the pleading eyes.

“I don’t want to see stupid ghosts. There’s no fun in them. Take me where I shall be amused, — some gay place.”

Bevan gave a low whistle. Unsophisticated as he was, he knew that this was not exactly what Miss Traill would approve of for Christine. But the confidence of her glance wrestled with his objection and threw it.

Well, it was the afternoon — not yet three o’clock; and she could come to no harm under his protection. He meditated a moment. “I tell you what we’ll do,” he said. “There’s skating at Olympia. We’ll go there; that is, if you like rinking.”

“Like it! I should just think I do,” she cried enthusiastically.

And half an hour after the two formed one of the swaying crowd in the big hall.

Shy as he was, it was pleasant enough to Bevan to find himself hand-in-hand with Chris-

tine, floating dreamily in the current of the skaters.

His thoughts held him; the oblivion of the opium-eater was upon him.

The moving figures, the voices and stir were dim and unreal. He was floating on a dream-sea towards a dream-haven. Indistinctly he was conscious that he had been so floating ever since the day when Boas had taken him, an unwilling guest, to dine at The Hatch.

The breezy sweep of Banstead Downs, the swift motion of his horse, Christine's voice on the autumn wind, — these were a part of the tide on which he had been borne.

Then there had been a blank of winter days, followed by the restlessness of spring and a dreamless sleep. These were the months in which he had not seen the girl.

Summer had given her to him again. She was part of the life of the south wind and the scented blossoms, and the golden sunshine, and the restful shadows of The Hatch garden.

And now it was late autumn again, and they two were alone in a throng of unknown faces, dreaming.

But all the world was not dreaming that afternoon at Olympia, and many eyes followed the two as they passed and repassed in the stream of skaters.

They were noticeable enough even among the widely different elements that compose a London crowd; and the tall, handsome Scotsman and his bright-eyed, bright-haired companion drew many admiring eyes.

All at once Bevan felt Christine's hand clutch his, and, glancing anxiously at her, he lost the words that followed the movement.

"Lor! if there hain't Tina Dow! And blest if she hain't got 'old of a 'owling swell. A 'andsome chap like that is her game. Come on and see wot she's been after this long while that's made her turn dowdy."

"This way — please come," faltered Christine, reining in her first impulse to greet her old acquaintance Nella. She dare not let Bevan catch even a glance of her old life; and she drew him after her to the other side of the hall.

In feverish haste and unaided she rid herself of the rollers, Bevan too astonished to follow her quick actions; and without waiting for him she hurried out and did not pause till she stood alone on the pavement outside.

She leaned against a hoarding, panting and breathless, and twisted her hands together in despair. Oh, why had she come to this place? What if Bevan had heard?

The dark of the November afternoon protected her from curious eyes. Along the street

angled, like the points of fire that
past, and revealed its darkness
She shivered as she thought of the
bold, bad face that had stared into hers. Had
Nella, her *friend*, always been like that? Had
she herself ever worn loud dresses, and hats
with huge feathers, a bang like that?

She put up a trembling hand, and felt her
forehead, from which the fringe had disap-
peared, leaving only little, fair curls that
softened the brow.

Then a thought sent a fiery pain through her.

“What if Bevan had heard? What if Nella
had followed him and spoken to him?”

The minute that passed before he rejoined
her added months to her life.

“My child, what a fright you have given me!
Why did you run away? Suppose I had not
found you? Lassie, you are ill. What can I
do?”

There was no change in his manner to her
but that of anxious solicitude — Nella had not
told him anything.

Christine raised her white face to his, wetting
her lips before she could speak.

“I must have been giddy. Let us go home.
I am so tired. No; don’t wait for a hansom —
the ’bus.”

There was one stopping at that moment. He

handed her in, and seated himself, full of anxiety for her.

Christine had the greatest difficulty in controlling her tears, and her quivering lips and strained face made their demands on his sensibilities.

He had seldom before seen her with that piteous appeal in her eyes and that humble bearing, and his man's protectiveness yearned over the little trembling creature.

But he was too shy and awkward to offer his sympathy. He could only look at her with eyes that revealed his secret to all but Christine.

Mrs. Crane, who was in the 'bus and also on her way to Victoria, put up her *pince-nez*, and impaled him on her glance.

"Honeymooners!" she said to herself. "*He* is rather good-looking."

CHAPTER IX.

"OH, LYRIC LOVE."

ONE afternoon The Hatch was invaded by callers.

Coming in from the frosty air outside Boas met a pleasant welcome in the hall.

The huge room had been curtained and screened into cosey nooks, and Eastern rugs gave colour and warmth to the oak floor. A fire blazed in the fireplace, and sparkled about the brass dogs on the tiles.

Joanna was making tea at a little table where a kettle bubbled and steamed, and an appetising smell of muffins invited surmise.

There were lights on the piano, and these, with candles in the old silver scones, made the gloaming hospitable. It had been Christine's idea to use the hall for afternoon tea when winter had driven them from the garden to the house, and in furnishing it Joanna had struck a balance between the old horsehair of the dining-room and the blatant newness of Mrs. Crane's boudoir. The restful air of the place gave the keynote to the house. Boas loved it, as he had

loved the green shade of the garden, and had become Joanna's most frequent visitor.

He had brought down his work and written under the elms during the summer, alternating his occupation by games of tennis with Christine.

Now he came down to secure an afternoon's leisure, and to listen to Joanna's music.

He made no secret of his fondness for the girl; and Joanna, noticing the subtle distinction he put between herself and the child, told herself she knew how all this would end.

She had not expected that his interest in Christine would develop into a warmer feeling. Under the circumstances it had seemed improbable, but she conceded that it was natural that the reformed Christine should attract him; and she strove to be content that it was so.

He was the most welcome as well as the most frequent visitor at The Hatch.

He usually found the two alone. To-day he was annoyed to discover Mrs. Crane and Mrs. Prothero in evidence.

Joanna had at last invited her sisters to renew the old relationship and visit her on the old terms; and they had been graciously pleased to set aside natural resentment and accept her invitation.

Their curiosity had been excited by a rumour that Boas was "paying attention" to Joanna.

Mrs. Crane studied the meeting between them, and was confounded by its unemotional nature. When she saw her visitor Joanna neither blushed nor became self-conscious, while Boas, after a greeting discourteous in its abruptness, threw himself down in a big chair, frowning on everybody, his hostess included.

"Where is Christine?" he asked suddenly.

"She has gone for a ride; but I expect her back soon," said Joanna.

Mrs. Crane raised her eyebrows.

"Does the girl ride? — and alone?"

"No," Joanna answered; "Davis always goes with her, of course. And sometimes Mr. Bevan also."

The name pricked Mrs. Crane's ears, and pierced through her disgust at the idea of such extravagant arrangements for Christine's pleasure.

"Bevan! Is he related to the man who wrote? — what was the name of the book now? I am sure you know what I mean."

"Yes," said Joanna. "He is the author."

"And you mean to say that a man like that wastes his time on a little chit living on charity?"

"He rides with Christine very often," said Joanna equably.

Mrs. Crane sank back in her chair, and Mrs. Prothero interposed: —

"Is it quite safe to allow that, Joanna? I have met Mr. Bevan. He looked quiet, but Fergus says he is a Bohemian."

Boas laughed. "I don't think he bites."

At this moment the door opened; the portière swung back, and disclosed a rosy face, bright eyes, wind-blown hair, and a daintily habited figure against the background of a snowy landscape.

Christine paused a moment in the doorway; then came in, graceful, self-possessed, and gave her hand to Boas. Joanna, a little flush of pride on her face, called her to her side and threw an arm round her, detaining her. "This is my child, Christine Dow. Dear, these are my sisters, Mrs. Crane and Mrs. Prothero."

Christine bowed gravely to each, and then threw a backward glance to the door, where Bevan stood in awkward uncertainty.

"Come in, Mr. Bevan," Joanna called. "I am sure you want a cup of tea after your ride."

Bevan came in with a moody, preoccupied air. More introductions followed, and Mrs. Prothero claimed acquaintanceship, in the midst of which Mrs. Crane dropped her *pince-nez* with a little cry.

"I was certain of it! I can't be mistaken. You were in a 'bus about a month ago with — with — Miss Dow." She jerked out the words,

and fixed Bevan with her unoccupied eye. "Now don't deny it. Your sin has found you out!" she said playfully.

"To ride in a 'bus—is it the microbe of a new crime?" Boas growled from his corner.

Mrs. Crane turned her back on him, and asked Joanna for a cup of tea.

Christine brought it to her in a graceful manner not lost on the lady.

"Very French in her style," she said to herself, watching the girl when she handed tea to the men, who sat still to be waited upon.

A sudden frost had blighted the conversation; and Joanna, inquiring after the health of Mrs. Prothero's children, was not able to restore its bloom.

The two men sat silent: Boas determinedly cynical and out of humour, Bevan trying to find a meaning in Mrs. Crane's questions.

Christine sipped her tea and watched Mrs. Crane's eye-glass.

Joanna was uncomfortable, and fluttered ineffectually about the subject of Willie's cough and Sissie's measles. Of the group, Mrs. Prothero was the only one interested.

Suddenly Boas looked up, bravely fighting his ill-humour.

"We might have some music. Miss Traill, will you . . . ?"

“I am not in voice to-day,” Joanna interrupted nervously. “But Christine will sing for us.”

She was doubtful as she said it of the wisdom of bringing Christine into notice, but she was anxious to show the beauty of her ward’s voice to her sisters.

Christine rose at once, and found some music. She played over a bar or two, and then Joanna stopped her.

“That is something new, is it not? Won’t you sing one of our old favourites, dear?”

“You will like this,” said Christine quickly, and went on playing. After a few bars of music she began to sing:—

“Adown a valley sighing,
A shepherd swain I spied;
With surly hum a bumble-bee
Kept buzzing at his side.
‘Your love’s untrue — she loves not you,’
He buzz’d all through the morn,
As down the valley sighing
The shepherd went forlorn.
For love is like a bee;
From stings it ne’er is free;
There’s not a heart but feels the smart,
For love is like a bee.

“Then down along the valley
I heard a maiden sing;
The shepherd swain forgot his pain,
Forgot the bee could sting.

He cried, ' My sweet, at last we meet;
 I love you so,' he cried.
 And down the valley singing
 They wandered side by side.
 For Love is like a song,
 It echoes all life long.
 The buzzing bee is Jealousy,
 But Love is like a song."

Joanna sat perturbed, doubting the propriety of Christine's singing such words ; but no one else shared her doubts. Boas had kept time to the music with a beat of finger, while the fresh sweetness of the girl's voice conquered his surliness.

Mrs. Prothero was not musical, and a somewhat fatuous smile denoted her enjoyment of the words only. Mrs. Crane, whose taste was undoubted, needed her energies to preserve indifference to the charm of voice and air and manner.

Christine's song in that room was like a jewel in quaint setting. It was impossible for any one to miss its flashing beauty.

Bevan sat with his hand over his eyes, apparently heedless of what was going on ; but all the time his nature was stirred to its depths, and in his soul was a passionate cry : —

Oh, lyric love! Half angel and half bird,
 And all a wonder and a wild desire. . . .

He was answered by a silence on which a voice floated to his ears.

“The girl has a fairly good voice. With training . . .”

He looked up. Mrs. Crane had seated herself beside him, and was giving Christine her tepid approval.

“Yes?”

Bevan was restless under the net her eyes wove round him.

“How clever you are!” she smiled; “but your apathy does not deceive me. . . . Do you know what I thought when I saw you in the ‘bus?”

“Scarcely!” he answered, frowning. “Confound the woman! Had she any thoughts?”

Boas had called Christine to him, and was praising her song. Bevan felt that his friend was taking a liberty, and he resented it as much as he disliked Mrs. Crane’s pats.

He was aware of the claw under the furry softness.

She bent towards him and looked archly into his face.

“And you are not curious? — the only man I ever met who was not. But you are a Scotsman, and that explains everything!”

“A Scotsman explains everything?” Bevan echoed.

Mrs. Crane simpered a little.

"If you were not so clever I should be afraid of you."

"I wish I were not so clever."

"But you are very amusing."

"My ambition soars no higher."

"I ought to have said I should be afraid *for* you."

"If I were not so clever?"

"That girl has designs on you."

"Conventional designs?"

"She is an artful, designing little minx. She has made a fool of my sister, failed with Mr. Boas. You are fair game."

"You are too kind."

"Happily for you she will never be successful as long as she lives here. That is the doom of the house. But, remember, I have warned you!"

He bowed.

Mrs. Crane blinked, rose, swept her skirts round, and fell upon Joanna, whom she scolded for throwing Christine at Bevan's head.

She did not succeed in making Joanna uncomfortable. Bevan had never changed his shy and reserved attitude towards Christine. He had been absent and silent all through the winter, and in recommencing the rides in the summer had resumed his indifferent manner.

Had it been otherwise she could not have consented to the girl's association with him.

She glanced towards Christine, who was talking to Boas in his corner.

Miss Traill could not hear what they were saying, but she saw the girl's face raised to his, and noticed the softened eyes with which she looked at him.

Relief and regret struggled together in Joanna's mind, and she said to herself that Mrs. Crane was wrong. Boas, not Bevan, was the person, if any, to whom Christine was attracted, and if he cared for her . . .

She strangled a sigh in her throat and looked wistfully at Boas, who was listening with unusual gentleness ; for Christine was telling him how the devil of unrest and ingratitude had been cast from her. Joanna's wistful glance passed to Bevan.

Under his quiet exterior he was a thunder-cloud charged. The lightnings of his wrath were ready to scorch Mrs. Crane for her "designing little minx," and his indignant anger told him what he had dimly seen since the day he had spent in town with Christine — that she was his love ; a —

Lyric love, half-angel and half-bird,
And all a wonder and a wild desire.

And it was this pure love that Mrs. Crane had smirched with her "designing little minx" !

If he had expressed his indignation to that lady she could not have left *The Hatch* in a worse mood. She discussed Christine with Mrs. Prothero in her most acrid manner, and afterwards snubbed the little lady who expressed a wish to invite her to Croydon.

Mrs. Prothero's reconciliation with Miss Traill had been complete, Joanna having told her Christine's presence at *The Hatch* would not lessen the portion set aside for her children.

"Isn't it beautiful to see how well Joanna gets on with those men?" she said enthusiastically to Mrs. Crane. "And so clever as they are! It is quite delightful to see them visiting her, and to hear their plans for helping the poor."

"You are a fool, Rachel," Mrs. Crane said frankly. "Can't you see through Joanna? She hasn't taken that girl to live with her without knowing what attractions men, and philanthropists too, find in a pretty face. Joanna means to marry, and is playing her cards for that. Ever since that proposal of Raglan's, two years ago, she has been a changed woman. How much better she dresses now; how young and bright she is! She can't entertain yet, but she has lost her nervousness. Did you hear that she goes twice a week into the slums and meets Mr. Boas there?—philanthropy, they

call it. And three years ago she couldn't say 'bo' to a goose!"

Bevan left Boas at The Hatch. He could not remain without showing his heart to Christine, and his native caution warned him against precipitancy.

He was not one of those whom love sublimates. The "wonder and the wild desire," that possessed him only made him more shy and silent.

It seemed a profanation almost to breathe the same air as Christine. He dared not look at her nor shake hands in taking leave; and Christine gazed after him in dismay when he went out without saying good-bye to her. Had she offended him?

Boas noticed how white and weary she seemed when he, too, took his leave.

The emotion of her talk with him had tired her, he told himself.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEAD PAST.

JOANNA was busy with a scheme for one of Boas's "settlements." She raised her head from the pile of papers before her, and looked anxiously down the drive.

Christine had gone for the first time to take tea with Mrs. Prothero, and Joanna was restless for her return. She was not quite satisfied as to the wisdom of sending Christine into society, as if nothing separated her from the girls she would meet there. Yet it was a narrow prejudice that would shut out the girl from the companionship of her own kind; she thought; and reproved herself for her distrust of Christine.

Four years had passed since she had been at The Hatch, and the time had transformed her in every respect. Joanna saw her as she had stood there hours ago, waiting for the carriage to take her to Croydon. She was still small and childish, but her figure had developed into graceful curves, and the wild-rose beauty of her face was charmingly simple and refined. There was nothing loud nor pronounced about her

now. The daring, ambitious little schemer had become a sweet and modest girl, full of right impulses and deeds. She was still wilful and contradictory at times, but of late some influence had been at work making her gentle and more patient, sometimes even sad; and there was an undertone of earnestness about her that nothing had predicted in her earlier life. On the day when she had seen Nella at Olympia she had cast off the last fetter linking her to evil. That one glance into the pit from which she had been taken had given the recoil towards purity; and in passionate hatred of her past she had thrown herself on the present, and clasped round her the golden chains that should bind her to goodness.

There was no revolt, then, against the dullness of *The Hatch*.

Her eyes were opened to see the ingratitude with which she had rewarded all Joanna's care and generosity, and nothing she could say was sufficient to express her penitence.

She had at first accepted her life at *The Hatch* from mixed motives, of which the best was a rather ignoble desire for the admiration of Boas, the only person she cared for. But the years had changed all that. She had begun to seek the good for its own sake and because she saw the ugliness of sin.

Boas had given the impetus that had launched her on virtue; but it needed something within herself to keep her there. And it needed Joanna's prayers and trust in her to develop the latent powers of good.

All these forces had worked together to keep her in the right path. She had ceased to be under Boas's influence, but she recognised her debt to Miss Traill, and gave her a passionate affection and admiration that reacted on Joanna, and made her, on her part, unconsciously justify the girl's faith in her strength and ability.

The four years had transformed Joanna as well as Christine. She had become alert, capable, forceful — a woman of resource; and her name was well known in philanthropic circles as a power. True, it was a power directed largely by Boas, but Joanna could act without him now when necessary. She had lost her nervous, apologetic manner, and her appearance, in spite of its continued delicacy, was impressive.

As she looked up from her papers this afternoon her pale face was alight with intelligence and charm and the power that her work had developed.

She had pitted her will against fate, and the individual had conquered.

The sound of wheels on the gravel made her spring up and hasten to the door.

Christine had alighted from the carriage, and Joanna took her hand and led her into the hall.

"Have you had a pleasant time, dear?"

"A lovely time, Miss Traill. Mrs. Prothero was so sorry your cold kept you at home. She sent her love."

"Was there any one at the house beside you?"

"Only Mr. Bevan." Christine blushed and occupied herself with the buttons of her glove. "Mrs. Prothero had asked him to meet you. Oh, yes," she added suddenly, "Mr. Prothero was there, and Mr. and Mrs. Crane. They asked me to sing."

"My dear, I am sorry."

"Sorry? Why?"

"Well, it may have been all right, but you have never been out without me before, you see."

"No; and I missed you. And Mr. Bevan wished you had been there."

Christine coloured again and dropped her eyes, but Miss Traill did not notice her consciousness.

The seed Mrs. Crane had planted in her mind a year ago had not germinated. She had long since dismissed from her thoughts all idea of complications between Bevan and Christine. Her idea of a lover—gathered from the court-

ship of Messrs. Crane and Prothero and Raglan — forbade her giving the name lover to a shy, reserved, and silent man like Bevan. Besides, it would have been ridiculous to suppose that a cultured, scholarly mind like his could be attracted by a child like Christine, ignorant and unformed for all her beauty.

Her suspicions had also been set at rest by the discontinuance of Bevan's visits to The Hatch. He had not returned since the day, twelve months ago, when he had met Mrs. Crane and received her warning.

The blushing confusion with which Christine mentioned him now did not prepare her for what was coming.

"Did they like your singing? Tell me what they said."

"I didn't hear—at least, only one," said Christine, shyly and incoherently.

"You are not so forgetful of pretty speeches as a rule," said Joanna. "Was it very complimentary?"

"Very," she said provokingly.

"Well, what was it?"

"Love is like a song."

Joanna looked disturbed.

"Dear, you know I don't like that song for you."

"I know," said Christine; "but Mrs. Pro-

thero asked specially for it, and I could not refuse. It would have been rude, I think."

Joanna smoothed the trouble from her brows. After all, was it not "narrow prejudice" again that made her disapprove of the song for Christine?

"Every one thought it very pretty," the girl went on. "And — shall I tell you what somebody said?"

"Yes, dear, tell me."

Joanna smiled at Christine's radiant air.

"He said that — 'Love is like a song.'"

"Silly child; that was not it."

"'He cried, my sweet, at last we meet; I love you so, he cried.'"

"Christine, do be serious."

"Truly, Miss Traill, that was what he said."

Joanna resigned herself to the laughing mischief.

"Dear child, I think your expedition has turned your head a little. You can't stand much gaiety, I am afraid."

She stroked the girl's hair fondly while she spoke.

"I don't think it was exactly gay," said Christine. "I listened to a long account of the dullest tea party imaginable."

"Well, take off your things, and then tell me about it."

Christine threw her hat and jacket on the divan, and sat down on a stool at Joanna's feet and looked up, her eyes dancing with fun, her pretty hair tossed and tumbled.

"It was so dull that it was funny. They sat with dim lights, and one lady escorted them through the galleries of her children's disorders. Another was playful, and they recognised the spite. A third dispensed bread and butter, chiefly conversational. A fourth — well" —

"You have been talking to Mr. Boas, child. I recognise his phrases. When he is bored he is cynical."

"No, I haven't. It was not he who said it. Shall I go on? — the tea party, you know. . . . There were two men, both as bad-tempered as could be. One because he was speaking to a girl, the other because he wasn't. Then they had music, and the girl sang."

"And that was all."

"No, it wasn't. I haven't finished. One of them loved her," Christine's voice faltered, "and for a whole year he never saw her; and she thought she had offended him, and he would never come again; and then" —

"And then?" Joanna said breathlessly, when the pause had lasted a long time. "And then?"

"She sang the song again, and he asked her to repeat the words, and so — and so" —

Christine's head drooped, and Joanna controlled her own voice sufficiently to say : —

“Child, you are crying. What is it, Christine?”

“I am not crying,” she sobbed. “I am only too happy.”

She threw herself on her knees, and flinging her arms round Joanna, she raised a smiling, tearful face to hers.

“Think of it, Miss Traill,” she whispered; “he loves me!”

“Mr. Boas?” Joanna cried sharply.

“Mr. Boas? No, indeed! How could you think so? Love *me*?”

Joanna trembled too much to speak.

“You haven't guessed right,” Christine said softly; “but there is only Mr. Bevan.”

“What is it? You are ill!” she cried a few moments later. “And how cold you are! Your hands are like ice. What is it? What has made you ill?”

Joanna could not control her shaking limbs. She put out a trembling hand to Christine.

“Child, does he know? Have you told him — about your past?”

“There was no need,” she answered wonderingly. “He has known me ever since I have been here.”

“Yes, yes, dear ; but before — before — your old life” —

A rush of colour flooded Christine’s face.

“I’ve never talked about it to you. How could I tell *him* ? ” she asked simply.

“Oh, my dear, have you forgotten ? ” Joanna asked helplessly.

“Forgotten ? ” said Christine, with a bitter smile ; “I pray every night that God will let me forget. I thought *you* had forgotten. You said no one should ever know but you and Mr. Boas. Why have you remembered now ? Why should he know ? ”

The colour had faded, leaving the girl white to the lips. Joanna shrank back from the still passion on her face.

In a flash she saw what she had done. The consequences of a fatal silence had overtaken her.

Why had she not dared the world, published the past, and helped her child to fight it in the eyes of all ?

Would not Christine’s redemption have been as sure, her atonement as fruitful, if enacted on the open stage of the world’s censure ? Indeed, would not the future have been more certain by reason of strength gained in conflict with opposition ?

What if Mrs. Crane and Mrs. Prothero had

condemned her? Need that have lessened her chances of ultimate self-conquest? By Joanna's silence she had only secured a short reprieve for Christine, and had dulled the girl's perceptions of her real position. They had conspired to bury the dead past; and, lightfooted, Christine had danced on its grave. But the covering earth had been washed away; the polluting corpse was visible, and the dancing feet were chained to it!

She looked in the girl's uncomprehending face with dumb entreaty for pardon. It was she, Joanna, who had wronged her.

Four years ago Christine's blunted sensibilities, undeveloped morality, crude knowledge of evil, would not have shrunk from the exposure of her past.

Now, with her ripened sensitiveness, her refinement, her experience of an unfettered present, the recital of her story must scarify her, and blast her hopes of the future.

There was little chance that Bevan's love would survive the shock of his enlightenment, and yet he must be told. One ray of hope for Christine struggled through the darkness that fell upon Joanna with the thought of Bevan's knowledge. He was not like some men. He was free from that ugly vice shown up by one of our modern novelists — the “voluptuous

egoism" that clamours for infinite purity in woman.

In him there was no "voracious æsthetic gluttony for feminine spotlessness."

Joanna, a strong-souled woman, who could distinguish between chastity of soul and entire ignorance of evil, knew that there were also men keen-sighted for the distinction. Among these, she thought, was Bevan.

Christine's unconventionality, errors in speech and breeding, had not repelled him. He had not sought birth or wealth or fashion in the girl he had chosen. He had loved her for herself. Might he not have eyes to see the beauty of the jewel that, lifted from the mud, retained its purity untarnished by its environment?

Joanna knew that Christine's soul had passed untainted through the den of infamy. Of her past she only knew as much as Boas hinted to her. His words could have but one interpretation, and she shrank from open knowledge.

But she was convinced that, whatever the past might have been, Christine's instincts were pure and innocent, those of a good woman. But still she must bear the shame of her confession.

Joanna could not face the thought; and her soul climbed its Calvary in the passionate longing that it had been Boas who had loved the girl, Boas who needed no confession.

Again her eyes sought Christine's. The girl stood before her, cold, proud, silent; all her gladness and gaiety dispersed. She could not understand Joanna's agitation, and her silence tortured her.

All at once her eyes became wide and frightened. She seized Joanna by the shoulders, and shook her with all her young energy.

"Why do you look at me so?" she panted. "What do you mean? Why are you so silent? Tell me what you mean?"

"Christine, don't. Don't, my child," Joanna said, gently releasing herself. "It is because I love you that I cannot bear that you should tell your story to any one."

"I don't intend to," said Christine, defiantly.

"He must be told, dear," said Joanna, not noticing the outburst. "It will be terribly sad for him; but he must be told, even if he should give you up. . . ."

"Give me up!" Christine exclaimed scornfully. "You don't know him if you think so."

She paced up and down the room, talking rapidly.

"You don't know anything about him if you can say that. He was only a poor man, working in a mill, before he wrote his books. He won't give me up because I was near starving once. He ain't that sort."

In her excitement she had returned to her old speech and manner. There was nothing left in her of the refined passion of five minutes before.

Joanna trembled as she saw again the Christine she had first known.

"I know, dear, I know," she said soothingly. "He won't give you up because you were poor, but his wife must be a good woman" —

"And ain't I good?" blazed Christine. "I — I" —

Joanna's gaze faltered before the furious eyes.

"Oh, my dear! the past" —

"But you say God loves me in spite of it. And it didn't prevent Bevan's loving me. Why should his knowing what I was make me different — not fit for him to love?"

Christine stamped her foot, and choked with passion.

Joanna could not answer. Big tears rolled down her face. She put out her hands appealingly.

"My dear, none is good, not one, only God. He is — love."

.

"*Must* I tell him?" Christine moaned pitifully, when Joanna went to her the last thing that night.

Miss Traill stroked the damp hair from her forehead.

She dared not give voice to her hope that the sight of the girl's humiliation would move Bevan's heart to comprehend and forgive.

"My darling, yes. God will help you. I would tell, or Mr. Boas, but it is better that you should."

"Yes," said Christine humbly, then her lips trembled.

"I don't think he will blame me. I was so young, and I didn't know. It wasn't my fault. Why is the world so wicked? It wasn't my fault. I was so young, and I had nobody."

CHAPTER XI.

STORM.

THE next afternoon Bevan came, a shy, proud, expectant lover.

He asked for Miss Traill, and was shown into the drawing-room, where Christine awaited him.

His eyes flashed at the sight of her; and his nervousness vanished, overcome by his triumphant love.

But she repelled him.

He stopped short and stared at her, alarmed at her white face.

“Lassie!”

“Yes,” she faltered. “Wait. Not yet. Miss Traill” —

“She consents!”

“Not yet. Not till . . . Please sit down. . . . I must tell you” —

“Nothing — till you say you love me.”

She shivered at his commanding air, and her little figure looked strangely helpless and pathetic beside the big, handsome man.

He dominated her will, but she could resist

him. Because she loved him she had strength to be true to him and to herself ; and she would not accept one caress from him till he knew her story.

She was very white, and the agony through which she had come had left its traces upon her. But her still face gave no hint of the passion surging through her.

And yet she never doubted that Bevan would love her. She feared to make her confession, but she had no dread of its result. She was confident that Bevan would pity and still love her.

"I do love you," she said, very simply, lifting sad eyes to his.

"Then it is Miss Traill?"

She shook her head, and he gazed at her, puzzled by her manner.

"Come and tell me all about it," he said, and would have drawn her to his side on a sofa.

She gently resisted him, and sat down on a hassock where he could not see her face.

He drew her closer to him, and touched her cheek with loving fingers:

"Let us have the story. We'll soon get rid of Miss Traill's objections. I owe her something for making these cheeks so wan. What a different meeting from the one I expected!"

"Ah, don't!" she gasped, drawing a long

breath. His laugh had keen edges for her quivering heart.

"You have never asked me about my mother," she whispered.

"No. You shall tell me about her some day."

"Now. . . . She was a good woman. . . . She died, and never saw me."

"My poor wee lassie!"

"My father was not a strong man. I grew up anyhow. Then he died of starvation. And I . . . would have died too."

"But Miss Traill brought you here."

"Not yet. Not for a long time. . . ."

Her voice failed. The words clattered in her throat.

"Hold my hand," she begged. "I can tell you better so."

He took her ice-cold hand in his, wondering at her agitation. But he guessed its meaning. She was afraid to tell him that she was a dependent on Miss Traill's charity.

He looked tenderly at her, thinking how he would reassure her when her sad little story was ended.

"One day Mr. Boas — found me. He was not like — the others. He looked at me . . . with my father's eyes, . . . and he cried — great tears — for me, because I was so young. And he took me away. . . . And afterwards Miss Traill. . . ."

“And was that all?”

Bevan laughed aloud, and pressed the hand he held.

“My bairn, how you have worried yourself for nothing! I kenned it all along.”

She bent her head on his hand, sobbing; unnerved by the thing she had told him, the relief to find he knew.

“There is no shame in poverty, lassie,” he said. “What degrades is sin and evil, not the want of money.” He laid his hand tenderly on her head.

“But it was sin,” she moaned. “Though they were good to me, it was sin. Three weeks I was there. . . . And I never thought. . . . Every one was the same. . . . Nella . . . she was kind . . . and the rest. . . . It was . . . a shameful place! . . . I knew afterwards . . . too late . . . that . . . that it was hell.”

She broke again into passionate weeping.

Bevan did not take his hand from her head, but his fingers had stiffened while she spoke.

“Woman!” he said at last, the word scorching his lips like a live coal — “woman! you can’t mean that! It is not true; — for God’s sake tell me it is not true! You were not . . . three weeks . . . in one of those dens?”

She shuddered through every nerve of her body, and slid to the floor, and lay, face downwards, at his feet.

"Oh, my God! a baby like that!" he cried.
... "And I worshipped your white soul. . . ."

He turned away his eyes to shut out the sight of her humiliation, and slow tears forced themselves through his eyelids. He felt he had no right to witness her shame, and he rose, and would have gone from the room, but she held his feet, and raised a despairing face.

"You are not going?"

"Going? Can I stay? Let me go, girl."

"No, no! Your love. . . ."

"It is dead! Did you think any man's love could stand — *that*? Let me go," he said again sternly. "It is better for both of us."

"No, no!" She sprang to her feet and stood before him with panting breast. "You can't mean it! You can't! Dead? Your love dead? It dies easy. I could die . . . but not my love. It kills . . . kills. . . ."

She tugged at her dress for relief to the heaving bosom. She had never been so beautiful as at that moment; but Bevan turned from her with loathing.

She shrank from his look as from a blow, and fled to a corner of the room, where she crouched on the floor; her eyes — surely no one had ever seen such eyes before.

They were wide and fixed and full of blank misgiving as she stared into "a world unreal-

ised.” She had lost her foothold on joy; — love and faith and hope were like shattered ice under her feet. There was nothing beneath or above her. The years of her purity had disappeared before the strong light of his judgment.

Bevan had failed her. She was once more an outcast from society, a dishonoured woman, thrust back into the depths. She was sinking — sinking.

She struggled to her feet and put out her hands helplessly towards him. “I can’t feel,” she gasped; “I can’t think . . . your love dead? . . . But you loved me yesterday, and I’ve done nothing since then. . . .” Her voice rose to a cry. . . . “But I’m not fit . . . I’m not fit! . . . Only I love you so . . . I . . .”

She laid her hand on his arm with pitiful entreaty, but he put her harshly from him, and moved away.

He reached the door and then he turned. Her eyes had pierced his anger to the spring of love and brought the waters to the surface. Infinite pity pleaded for her, and not in vain.

Trembling, he stepped back, gazed irresolutely. Her throat was bare, she regardless of it.

The flesh revolted him, and raised a tempest in his bosom. The storm broke. From the cloud fell the pelting ice words, stinging fire.

"I ought to thank you, I suppose. . . . You need not have told. The fool was fooled. . . . Would not have known . . . in time. What made you hesitate . . . at the end of your work? Yet, for that, I thank you."

Her eyes stared into his. Her breath died on her lips. She had no other shelter from his anger. Shivering, she drew her loosened hair about her, seeking protection.

The movement softened him. Again pity and love strove for pardon, pleading her shame, her youth.

"You are such a little thing," he groaned; "such a little thing—for sin!" He could not go on. After a time he found his voice again.

"God knows how I loved you. . . . If I could have saved you. . . . But though I loved you to a thousand deaths I could never make you clean. . . . Marry you . . . nor any good man could."

He was gone.

Half-way down the drive a long, wild scream drove the blood from his heart.

It followed him. He stopped his ears with his fingers and ran; but still it pursued him.

Joanna had heard the cry, and from the passage where she waited trembling she sprang into the drawing-room.

Christine stood there, white and still as death. Was it she who had screamed?

"My child, my child!" Joanna sobbed, running to her.

The girl put her aside roughly.

"I must be alone . . . to think. . . . Yes; it is all over. He says no good man would ever marry me."

She smiled.

"Where are you going, my brave darling?" Joanna detained her.

"I don't know. Anywhere. On the downs. I'll ride; get away from it."

"Dear child, it will soon be dark. Davis" —

"I don't want Davis, nobody; I must go. The house stifles me. Don't you understand?"

"Yes, yes, my poor darling. But so late . . .?"

"I am not afraid of the night. I belong to it."

She moved to the door, and Joanna did not follow. Christine was better alone, fighting her battle in her own way.

She waited till she heard the feet of the pony going down the drive; then she went to her room to pray for the child crushed in the grasp of inevitable laws.

She did not fear the ultimate result of this trial on her charge.

The roots of the plant were too firm in the good soil to be readily torn away. Christine would return from her ride a stronger woman for the storm that had passed over her.

But as time went by a terrible fear overcame Joanna's assurance, and when it came to ten o'clock she sent Davis in search of the girl.

An hour after he came back, alone, leading the pony. He had met a boy bringing it to The Hatch, with a note.

She opened the paper with unsteady fingers, and the words swam before her eyes.

"It is no use trying to be good. I am going back. Don't try to find me. Girls like me can't be saved."

CHAPTER XII.

MIDNIGHT LONDON.

JOANNA'S first instinctive cry was for Boas. In the work before her she needed a man's help, and who so able as he? It was after twelve o'clock when she reached London. He had rooms over his office in George street, and she found that he had come in five minutes before her.

"Miss Traill! . . . What is it? . . . Not Christine? . . ."

"Yes; gone back to her old life, she says."

He took up his hat and turned to the door.

"Come along, I know where to look for her. You can tell me on the way."

Joanna's hansom was waiting, and they stepped in, the street lamps flashing past them as they dashed along. The roar of traffic was becoming dull; the weary city was closing its eyes for the night. In the hansom it was possible to speak and be heard.

"What has happened?" Boas asked.

"Mr. Bevan asked her to marry him yesterday. She loved him, poor child. I persuaded her to tell him her history."

“You did? Good!”

“I hoped. . . . I scarcely doubted. . . . It was worse than you could have thought. . . .”

“Do you mean to say — he refused her — after that?”

“Yes. No good man could ever marry her, he said.”

“Told her that?”

Joanna bent her head, fighting with tears.

“The infernal liar!” said Boas.

“Christine” —

“Poor, dear child, how did she take it?”

“It killed all feeling. She left me — would ride.”

“And then?”

“This!”

She drew a paper from her pocket and handed it to him. He held it before the lamp, twisting himself forward, and read Christine’s note.

“That’s it!” he said bitterly. “‘Girls like me can’t be saved.’ No, my poor child, not as long as the world heats its hell-fired morality to brand you harlot. Not as long as the Spirit of Christ is absent from our midst. ‘Neither do I condemn thee.’ . . . But we are so very moral. We out-Christian Christ. . . . I beg your pardon. These things make my blood boil. Poor child! poor child! hurled back into the darkness.”

"I am not afraid for her," said Joanna.

He looked at her and shrugged his shoulders.

"I wish I wasn't."

"No; she is passionate and impulsive. She has run away; but not to that life."

"I can't be so sure. There would be nothing else for her. She would be flung back on her old self. It's not so long since she came from it. Habit is strong."

"Constitutional tendency is stronger," said Joanna.

"The worst for most of us then," he growled. "Yet you are trembling. What are you afraid of?"

Through the white lips the words shuddered, "The river."

"No. She would not have written this, 'I have gone back.' Besides, she is not the sort of girl that drowns herself. We shall soon know. Here's the house she lived in before they got her away."

He stopped the cab at a mean-looking house.

"I have been here before," said Boas. "The day I found her I brought her here. She would naturally come here first."

In answer to his knock a woman came to the door. No, Christine had not been there, she said.

Boas failed to entrap her into any other

answer, and was turning away disappointed when a girl standing outside accosted him.

“Is it Tina Dow you’re after? Bless you, she’s back again. Tired of bein’ respectable she is. And, lor! what a dowdy she’s turned out!”

“Where is she?”

“Where should she be but on our tracks? I seed her in Shaftesbury avenue. She ain’t swell enough now for the West-end. She’s at the Horseshoe by this time. That’s good enough for her sort. Go along and you’re sure to find her.”

Boas had no time for this girl. With a heavy heart he turned to the cab, where Joanna was sitting impatient.

“We must walk — find her — she is here,” he said.

The skin tightened on Joanna’s face, but she alighted with steady feet. She needed all her strength if Christine were to be saved.

“We are more likely to come on her walking,” said Boas. “Take my arm.”

Joanna laid her hand on his arm, and together they walked till they came out into Shaftesbury avenue.

“We’ll wait here,” said Boas.

A large theatre had emptied itself, and the street was crowded with vehicles and people.

Among these Boas flashed his eyes, scanning every girl's figure. Christine was not there, and by and by the crowd thinned. Cab followed cab in rapid succession.

The lights in the lamps quietened; a footfall echoed; across the shadows flitted a woman's light dress.

"She's not likely to be hereabouts — but that girl seemed to know. We may as well go down on the off-chance," said Boas, and without a word Joanna turned. Neither spoke.

At Tottenham Court road corner the day was struggling with death, and the lights and bustle of the "Horseshoe" defied the night.

The pavement was ablaze from the open door. The lamps of 'bus and cab searched the shadow where an old woman still sat holding the can that all day had gaped for pence. An unsteady roll of wheels; vagabond, half-hearted cries of "Bank," "London Bridge Station," came round the corner and mingled with the rival calls, "Victoria," "Charing-cross," "Piccadilly."

Belated revellers hurried towards the oyster-shops. A flower-girl shrilled her faded wares.

It was the last flicker before the day's burnt taper died out in darkness and silence.

Boas studied the group of girls under the lamp. She was not among them.

"I don't know," he hesitated. "Piccadilly

is the place, and yet she might have been so reckless as to come here. She used to come here. We'll go down."

They passed the tavern, and penetrated the comparative quiet of Tottenham Court road. Here the furniture shops had long since been closed, and the street was quieter. Hurrying figures traced clear shadows on the pavement. To Joanna, after the glare of the corner, it seemed a solitude. They went to the end of the road, and back again without seeing any one like the girl they were seeking.

During this time the street had emptied itself, and Joanna could hear the heel of her shoes clattering on the stones. It was after one o'clock, but she had no thought of time.

Along Oxford street into Regent street, down towards Piccadilly Circus they walked, following now and then a figure that reminded them of Christine's, peering into evil faces, straining into eyes bold, defiant, and wretched.

It was Joanna's first glance into midnight London, into the inferno peopled by these sad ghosts of womanhood. Under every hat she saw Christine, and her heart yearned over each one.

Boas felt her shudder when the flare of a lamp showed two figures, and a coin lying in the woman's hand. He looked at her, and saw that her lips were moving in prayer.

Every street into which they went was empty for them. "Give it up?" Boas asked when three o'clock chimed.

"No," said Joanna. "I must find her. If you are tired I can go on."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Come along."

He pulled her hand under his arm again and they went on together. Her endurance, courage, silence, impressed him. He recognised the strong soul she was.

There was scarcely a well-known resort in the neighbourhood unvisited by them that night.

Through every one Joanna walked, her womanhood guarded by her great love and pity. She saw sights that few women had ever seen—no good woman before her. She went unblushing through scenes that, imagined only—if imagination of such had been possible—would have made her die of shame. That night she ate the fruit of the knowledge of evil; but when in the dawn she and Boas stood—alone still—and looked into each other's faces she met his eyes steadily.

"Now what?" said Boas.

She smiled with white lips.

"I think—home. It is not too soon for a

train. She may be there. If not, I shall return immediately. I must search till I find her."

Boas was on the point of suggesting "a wire," but he thought it would be better for Joanna to go home, so he kept silence.

"You are a brave woman," he said.

"I can't leave her here, after seeing" —

"No. Well, I'll go with you to the station. You must have a glass of wine. Don't come back too soon. I'll make inquiries here and wire if I hear anything. Meanwhile you must rest."

"Thank you."

Boas waited till the train had gone, then walked from the station with bent head, pondering over the night's events.

"She is a good woman, and a brave. I never saw a braver. She'll not find the girl at home, but I hadn't the heart to tell her so. Meanwhile I'll hunt up Bevan, and tell him what he has done."

Early though it was, Bevan himself answered Boas's impatient ring at the door. He had evidently been up all night. His face was changed, scarcely recognisable. Through that night he had fought with his pain and his love for Christine. He loved her still, and he could not forget the bitter humiliation in which he had left her.

But, for the time being, the shock of the revelation she had made had set aside his love. He could not at once adapt his affection for the innocent child to the needs of a woman who had sinned. And he was having a mighty struggle with himself: wounded pride and baffled longing fighting against his tenderness and pity.

The signs of the conflict were upon him, but Boas had no sympathy for his altered appearance.

"I hope you are satisfied with your work," he said grimly.

"What work?" Bevan put his hand to his head, dazed.

"I want to know," Boas blazed out, "what right you have, or any other man, to sit in judgment on that girl? How dare you say she is not a fit wife for any one? That no good man would marry her? You scoundrel! you confounded fool! No man marry her? No! because there is no man good enough to marry her."

He moved away, but turned again.

"How dare you say such a thing to her, standing bare before you? Had you no honour, no pity, for the woman's shame? Did it cost her nothing to tell you, do you think? And you judged her like a common prostitute — you and your precious morality!"

Bevan made no answer, and his silence lashed Boas's wrath.

"Well, I hope you are satisfied with your damnable work." You have sent the girl to the devil. She is on the streets now, if she never was before."

"It is not true!" said Bevan.

"True? God knows it's true; and you are the man who has done it; and it's on your head that this night's work will fall."

"Oh, my God!"

Bevan staggered against a table, and clutched at it to save himself from falling.

"Tell me where I can find her," he groaned.

"You'll never find her," said Boas. "She is lost, body and soul, and it's your work."

In a passion of disgust Boas went off, leaving Bevan to the wolf of remorse.

Meanwhile, Joanna was entering her bedroom at The Hatch. She let herself into the sleeping house, and went first to Christine's room, hoping against hope to find her there.

The bed was empty; and faint and heart-sick she passed on to her own room.

The tears she had repressed so long blinded her; and she threw herself on her knees with agonised prayer for the child.

When she rose again — was it a miracle? Christine was before her.

Yes, there she lay, white and wan, asleep on Joanna's pillow. But was she asleep?

She lay like one dead; and, trembling, Joanna bent over her to listen if she breathed.

She could hear the beat of her own heart, but not Christine's; but while she stood, shocked into dumb fear, the girl's lips moved.

Joanna could restrain herself no longer. The pent-up passion of the night burst in a rush of sobs.

She caught the girl in her arms, and sobbed and laughed and wept, wild in her great happiness.

Christine struggled in her arms.

"What is it? What is it? Have you come at last? Is it morning?"

"Yes," Joanna laughed, "it is morning."

CHAPTER XIII.

DON QUIXOTE.

“THE fact is,” said Boas, “I never expected to see her again. She is a girl of such strong passions that, thrown back on herself, I saw nothing before her but ruin. I never expected Bevan, of all men, to fall in love with her; but, having done so, he has acted brutally towards her. I can’t understand his action at all.”

“I hoped more from him,” said Joanna. “His books are so tender, so pure; his respect for womanhood is beautiful.”

“In print,” Boas said dryly. “Type is one of our modern draperies. Few of us can go naked.”

Joanna and he were in the drawing-room of The Hatch. He had received her telegram that morning, and had wired back to say he would run down to Sutton after dinner to see Christine.

But he did not see her. She had been in bed all day, too weak and exhausted to rise; and Joanna was glad to keep her there away from the curious eyes of the household. There was

much discussion in the housekeeper's room, and Christine's flight and return were a fair field for the imagination to work in ; but none of the servants had arrived at their true explanation.

Now Joanna's *tête-à-tête* with Boas had turned the gossip into another channel. The mistress's radiant face provoked criticism.

Even Boas noticed it, and looked at her with surprise. He had expected to find her pale and suffering from fatigue. Instead, she was sparkling, more animated than he had ever seen her. Her face was flushed ; her eyes danced ; her mouth took tender curves. Emotion made her beautiful.

"Did the girl tell you anything?" Boas asked.

"Yes, the whole story. She made up her mind to run away soon after she went out. She was in despair ; she thought it was no use trying to do right. She would drown her misery in the old life. Since Mr. Bevan did not love her, she did not care what happened to her. With a girl of her temperament I think all this was natural. She would go to extremes in her first passionate grief. And she went to the house where she lived before. But the evil appalled her. She had had no conception of it before, and she could not remain there. She went out ; but the girl, Nella, insisted on going

with her, and she could not shake her off. They walked about for hours, and I think it was this girl that made her want to come back to me. At last she managed to get rid of her, and she found her way to Victoria, was in time for the last train, and came on here. When she reached The Hatch it was very late. Mrs. Sykes was sitting up, but Christine sent her to bed, and told her she would let me in. Then she went to my room and crept into my bed, and there I found her."

"Poor child! How is she now?"

"Terribly exhausted and quite changed. You wouldn't know her for the same. All her spirit is gone. She takes no notice of anything, and lies with her eyes shut, moaning."

"Grieving for Bevan, I suppose."

Joanna shook her head.

"I don't think so. He seems to have killed her love for him."

"Poor little soul!" said Boas. "What a fool the man is! By the way, he has left town—gone nobody knows where—thrown up his journalism—everything. I sent to his office after your telegram, and got that in reply. I don't wonder he runs away after telling the girl no good man would marry her."

"I understand what he meant," said Joanna. "Christine must accept the truth bravely. Her

past forbids happiness of that sort for her. How many men would marry her, knowing her history?"

Boas stamped up and down the room.

"That's where I am maddened. That's where society combines to ruin the unfortunate in this world and the next. It is scarcely possible for one to get away from the life. And the rule of redemption laid down for them by our morality will never raise them higher."

"I see where the system fails," said Joanna. "But the error has its roots lower still. If we were better men and women we should not set them in a class by themselves. As long as they are outcasts they are hopeless. If more women were brave to recognise the trade, and fight it, we should accomplish more. But we are hedged in. . . ."

"These damned conventions" —

"No; they are necessary."

"They have never yet saved the fallen."

"They have kept thousands from falling."

"You are right. But you are scouting conventions yourself in this matter of Christine's redemption. It should have been conducted by the orthodox ways — pillory, penitence, purity. Do you suppose society would approve of the pleasant path to virtue by which you have led the girl?"

"Is her redemption less valuable because we have developed her wings instead of hobbling her feet?"

Boas shrugged his shoulders.

"You know *I* approve. But then society does not approve of me or my creed. For instance, I believe Christine will make a better wife for having known temptation and resisted it."

"If Mr. Bevan could not see that, I don't think that any will beside you," said Joanna sadly.

Boas stopped in his march up and down and looked in her face, "Do you really think so?"

She bent her head.

He took two or three quick strides, and stopped again before her.

"The poor child's heart is broken," he said, his manner even more jerky than usual. "Bevan will not come back again. Married, she would make a noble woman. Unmarried — it's a risk. . . . What do you advise? Shall I do it? I have influence with her. She is fond of me. Tell me, my wise friend. Shall I ask her to marry me?"

"Do you — do you love her?"

"Love her? — n — no, not exactly," he answered boyishly. "I am fond of her, of course.

Your interest in her is quite enough to make me like her, without anything else. I suppose I should be happy with her, as happy as with any one I know. I have never thought of marrying. She's — Well, what do you say? Under the circumstances my name and protection will be worth — something, eh?"

Joanna struggled with the faintness creeping over her that threatened to betray her agitation. But she need not have feared. He was keeping his gaze from her, his eyes glowering into the future.

The scowling face was not that of a happy lover.

"Do you advise it?" he said impatiently.

"Yes."

The word came clear as a bell from her strained throat.

"And you will speak to her? Persuade her to consent? Show her it is the best thing for her to do?"

"Yes."

"That's settled then."

Yet this arrangement made him unsettled, dissatisfied.

He was ready to offer up himself, but he was not willing that Joanna should counsel the sacrifice. Or if she did, he would have liked her to do so with unstinted admiration of his heroic

surrender. She ought to have invested his plans with the glamour of self-abnegation, she ought to have surrounded them with adulation of himself.

The strong friendship, intimacy, between them was jarred by that unemotional "Yes."

Since the first months of their acquaintance Joanna had never pleased him so little. He resented her calmness.

She, poor soul, was fighting her own battle. Under that white calm her soul was seething. Love, pride, passionate renunciation boiled in her.

She loved him — loved as a woman loves once in her life only, with her heart touched to the quick; cloven in two that she might yield the more to him. And she had bidden him offer himself to another: she had put from her the love that as a secret thing only could stir her nature to its depths.

Her soul had been bare to him. She was his comrade, unable to move but in step with him. She had worked her best by his side, her hand in his hand. Must she yield all this? Must she break the jar that held the wine of life?

"What of the heart without him?"

Even Joanna's brave soul could not face that thought. The blood grew chill in her veins. She did not ask his love, she had never looked

forward to love's return. She only wanted to be free to love him—to hold him in her heart without sin. And his marriage with Christine would make her heart empty.

But she sat still before him, and while her life died in her she bade him marry the girl she had saved from infamy.

That sacrifice she did not grudge. To see Christine safe from evil she would have cut off every limb from her body.

There was no pain in seeing the girl married to Boas. The agony was in the knowledge that she must tear him from her heart. That the lights on the altar must go out in darkness and desolation forever.

.
It was three months after. The Hatch was gloomier than ever, for October was holding dismal sway, and the elms were raising bare arms up to a grey and desolate sky.

Inside the house the shadows deepened until they fell upon Joanna's face and made it grey. Some change had passed over her since August.

The doom of The Hatch was upon her.

Boas came from his interview with Christine, smiling comically.

He had not the air of a man who had been rejected, and Joanna, shyly searching his face for signs, could not augur results.

He threw himself on a seat beside her, his arm resting on the back of her chair.

She was sewing busily, and after the first glance she did not look at him.

He flung his head back and laughed aloud.

"The little minx has refused me!"

Joanna's needle pricked her finger, drawing blood. She bandaged it slowly and carefully before she ventured to lift her face.

"It is impossible. When I spoke to her she seemed ready — willing," she said hoarsely.

"Seems not. Refused me plumply."

"I am sorry."

"Not for me, I hope. I never knew I hated matrimony so much as since I thought of entering it. To be refused is always surprising, sometimes unpleasant. I own to the surprise, but I find it uncommonly agreeable."

He laughed again — a simple, honest laugh, by no means forced.

There was no doubting the sincerity of his relief. It was quite evident that love had not prompted the offer he had made to Christine.

Joanna, looking at him, was dumb under the intensity of her relief. She wondered that she had ever counselled the step, for now that it was not to be, the advantages of the marriage had lessened to a vanishing point.

"The child seems to be in a low way," he remarked, after a while.

“Yes; I am very anxious about her. She has been like that ever since August — tired and listless, taking interest in nothing. I had hoped — this would have made a change.”

“Not it. She looked straight at me. ‘Are you asking me out of pity, Mr. Boas?’ ‘Heavens, child, no! — unless it’s out of pity for myself. I want a home, and a dear little wife to look after me.’ ‘I am not the wife you want,’ said she. ‘Indeed, madam? Kindly tell me the sort of thing I want.’ ‘You want a woman strong enough for you to lean on — tender, to lean on you; — wise, to guide you — simple, that you may guide her — faithful in her love — loving in her faithfulness.’ ‘Oh, able and stable! And why can’t you supply these great qualities, Miss Christine?’ ‘Because I don’t love you.’ The little imp! I burst out laughing, and that offended her ladyship — and there’s the end. But the girl must be roused. This place won’t do for her any longer. What do you propose?”

“I had thought of a plan for myself if — Christine had left me,” said Joanna. “It would suit us both. To go to one of your settlements and live among the poor. It would help the child to forget her misery in helping others to bear theirs. It would help me. Don’t you think so?”

She glanced eagerly at him.

"Yes, nothing better. She can bear it now. Give her work. Let her help you with your girls. You might try Poplar."

"That is Mr. Bevan's district. It would be painful if they met."

"No chance of that. He is in Australia they say. At any rate, he will not turn up again in a hurry. . . . Take Christine down this week. You can have Miss Willard's flat; she left yesterday. I'll look you up on Saturday. I want to consult you on a new departure. The fact is, I don't know what I should do without you now. The best bit of work I ever did was the day I persuaded you to join us. Mind you take care of yourself. You look brighter now, but you were very pale when I came in; and you have looked wretchedly these three months, ever since Christine ran away. Don't let her worry you into your grave. We can spare her better than you."

He gave her hand a long clasp that sent the blood thrilling through Joanna's veins and brought a wistful happiness to her eyes.

For a long time she stood where he had left her, motionless in her great thankfulness. The stone had been rolled away from the grave where her love lay buried.

In the other room Christine sat with dim eyes

and a passionate pride in her heart, because she had been strong enough to refuse to enter the ark which just then tempted her weary wings. Because she had been able to sacrifice herself, and to set aside the love of a good man, for the sake of Joanna, who loved him.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAGDALEN.

BOND street on this June morning was at its busiest, for the season was yet in its glory.

The shop windows, disdaining the arts of Oxford street, wore plain faces, concealing a wealth of colour and fancy. Here and there one caught a glimpse of rich silk or glowing drapery; but the windows for the most part were unassuming, strong in assured position.

The street was cool and shady, lit at one end by a blaze of flowers, made eloquent at the other by the shop of a well-known artist in perfume. Between these outposts of sight and smell culture and art lay encamped.

And all the world was flocking to one of the galleries to see the pictures of the latest artistic mode.

The lobby was draped in purple, against which were hung copies of a few notable pictures,

Two splendid personages in dress suits stood in the inner shadow. One held a fold of the curtain admitting to the gallery; the other supported his gentility as best he could. A man

stood with his back to them, fascinated by one of the studies. The person with the curtain in his hand gazed at him impatiently from time to time, but in silence, for the laggard was not one to be hurried.

He was a tall, careworn man, dressed with brave indifference to the prevailing fashion.

His chin did not lean over a parapet of stiff linen; his coat owned honestly to seam and shape; the buttonhole was not congested by an orchid; his shoes were not of patent leather; but yet he was a gentleman.

His head was powerful, the eyes reading the picture keen beneath their sadness.

For half an hour he had stood without moving before Rossetti's *Magdalen*. That lovely curve of neck had fixed his eye, the flowing draperies entangled his feet; he was held captive by her hair.

He gazed, fascinated by the power and pathos of the picture. The wanton crowd, the house of Simon, the light creature returning from revel, the eyes of Christ drawing her, the detaining paramour.

And then into all these came a meaning unknown to the artist, and the subjective character of all great art painted another picture before Bevan

The woman was Christine. She flung back

the compelling hands of the past, and strained forward, fascinated by the loving, passionless eyes of Purity. And he, Amos Bevan, had not drawn her back, but *hurled* her back into the sin from which the Christ would have won her.

Oh, to have been wise in time ! To be innocent of the blood of this child !

Yes, he was guilty of her fall. He for whose delight the white flower of her love had blossomed.

She seemed to arraign him before the eyes of the Christ, crying that not society, not circumstance, but he, Amos Bevan, a lover of Purity, had thrust her again into the pit from which she had been taken.

He, a sinner, had uttered the doom infinite Purity could not speak : “ Neither do I condemn thee.”

And all the time he had loved her ; oh, God ! how he had loved her ! yielding to her all his store of reverence, fealty, homage.

She had transformed the world to him, giving him heart and courage to face it. She had renewed his perceptions, inspired him with high purposes, taught him the undertones of life. She had penetrated nature with her own happy spirit, and the springtime had never been so beautiful to him as when Christine smiled in the flowers and laughed in the sunbeams.

And still he loved her; and still she had influenced him; for the sharp sorrow of losing her had been the tool with which he had hewn out a new meaning from life. His love for her had attained its highest success when it urged him to fresh endeavours after an ideal purity in himself, that so he might supply her need. The eyes of the Christ in the picture held no more passionate longing to snatch the Magdalen into a purer life than did Bevan's as he thought of Christine.

"If I find her," he thought, "I will go on my knees and ask her to marry me. But I have no hope. The life must have killed her long ago."

With remorseful eyes he turned away from the picture, and was face to face with Christine and Joanna.

She recognised him, and for one moment they gazed at each other. Bevan made a step forward, then stopped.

Christine clutched at Joanna's arm, steadied herself, and without a movement of recognition passed on into the gallery.

The curtain fell between them, and left Bevan staring at its purple pall.

If that day he had met a bedraggled Christine in the streets he would have taken her by the hand, told her he loved her, and besought her to begin a new life with him.

But this girl, white, cold, proud, froze his soul. He dared not have spoken to her. He dare not go after her into the gallery now. He began to doubt if it were really Christine. But her emotion at the sight of him chimed her identity with the Magdalen of his thoughts; and Joanna's presence with her removed the last doubt.

Magdalen? The name insulted this girl. In spite of her past there was that about her which made the title inappropriate. He knew instinctively she had not returned to her old life; she was the same girl he had left, in whose purity he had believed, and yet how changed. The tiny, childish figure was Christine's. The beautiful eyes, the oval face, the soft, fair hair were the same. All else was different.

The lips had a pathetic droop; the cheeks, once so like a baby's, with their curves and dimples, were there; but the lovely colour had gone, the merriment, the mischief.

She was white and cold and still, a Christine carved in marble. Yet there was a noble dignity and strength in her appearance that told Bevan the thoughtless child had become a wise and purposeful woman.

His heart sprang to their next meeting.

But now he must go. He would not wait for them, waylay them when they left the gallery.

He had been travelling a year, and his clothes were worn and shabby. He must put himself in the hands of his tailor before he saw her again. He would go and call on Boas, and hear what had taken place during his absence.

Yet he lingered about the door, unable to tear himself away from her neighbourhood, and at last she loitered out.

Joanna had evidently given him time to get away, for she was unfeignedly surprised to see him. She turned full eyes on him, and he raised his hat, and came forward, shy and shamefaced, to meet her. She offered him her hand — Christine's, too, lay a moment in his. "Have you been in England long?" Joanna asked.

"A few hours only."

They walked on together, Bevan's eyes in leash, leaping from side to side, controlled with difficulty.

"I intended to call at The Hatch to-day," he said with an effort.

Joanna looked up quickly.

"You would have found no one there. We are living in town — Christine and I — at Poplar, in one of the new settlements. We see no visitors."

"But I . . . you would let me . . . the pleasure of calling . . . ?"

"We are so very busy; meeting and visiting

in the morning, classes at night. Christine, dear, have we an afternoon free for Mr. Bevan?"

"I am afraid not," the girl answered steadily.

"You see . . . Well, perhaps in a little time," Joanna nodded at him encouragingly. "We must say good-bye now; that is our 'bus — the green one. Thanks."

She let Christine pass in — waved her hand amiably, and left Bevan staring after them, unable to give a meaning to Joanna's encouraging manner.

Christine's refusal to see him was natural, and he was not greatly cast down by it. She had controlled her face well, but her hand had trembled when he held it.

He signalled a hansom; and, forgetting his tailor, started for Westminster.

Boas was in his office. He glanced up from the table where he was writing. "Oh! it's you," he said coolly, as though Bevan had been there the day before. "What have you come back for?"

"To bring out a book, and marry Christine."

"You have? Sit down. Suppose I tell you the worst of her?"

"I should not believe it. And, at any rate, I came back to look for her, to rescue her, and to marry her if she would have me."

“Ay! there’s the rub. She refused a better man than you nine months ago.”

Bevan bit his moustache.

“I know I don’t deserve it,” he said simply; “but no man could love and honour her more than I do.”

“You? You know nothing about her — people don’t know what that girl is. She took up the life you had tried your best to ruin, and has done a splendid work in Poplar — she and Miss Traill. She has come out of the fire one of the finest women in London. She’s too good for a cowardly fellow like you.”

“I know it. I have seen her.”

“The devil you have! Spoken to her?”

“Yes.”

“Well?”

“She will have nothing to do with me.”

“Serves you right. Miss Traill?” —

“Was her old kind self.”

“Trust her for that! What are you going to do now?”

“Beg Christine’s pardon and ask her to listen to me.”

“When?”

“I’d go to-day, but she has refused to see me.”

“Never mind her refusal, it’s womanly. Now look here, you have been a confounded fool in

this business; but I'll help you to make it right with Christine. She has been fretting for you ever since you left her, scoundrel that you are!"

Bevan's face cleared.

"How many names have you called me since I came in?"

"Well, don't you deserve them?"

"I have lived in torment for a year, believing her lost. You might have saved me that."

"I tried to find you, and couldn't. After that the thing lapsed. Well, come to my rooms and have lunch; then I'll go down to Poplar with you, and persuade the girl to see you."

About four o'clock they drove off together.

The "settlement" was a large brick house in a crowded neighbourhood.

They entered without ringing, and Boas consulted the indicator in the hall.

"They are in. Now for a climb. We haven't got a lift yet. Fourth story."

Bevan followed him, and they mounted up and up till they stood before a door, on which was a brass plate bearing Joanna's name.

A quiet-looking woman answered the bell, and led them through a small hall towards the reception room.

"I'll announce myself," Boas said, and advanced towards the door, standing open. He

entered, Bevan following, and Boas turned with his finger on his lips, signing him to be quiet.

Christine was in the room alone, asleep on the sofa.

“Wait here for me,” Boas whispered. “I’ll see if Miss Traill is in her study.”

Bevan sat on the nearest chair, his heart beating audibly, his dilated pupils clouding his sight.

Presently the mists cleared, and he saw the girl clearly.

Her face was whiter than it had been in the morning. Now and then a sigh, almost a sob, escaped her.

His eyes studied every line of her face, and he saw what havoc the months had wrought with her beauty.

Yet every line of pain was dear to him ; every trace of anguish was the scar of a noble conflict.

His heart yearned over her. There was no memory of wrong between them.

His own grief had strengthened his eyes to see the star struggling out of the darkness.

He knelt beside her and touched her hand softly.

“Christine !”

She opened her eyes, and recognition flooded her face. He could not look at her. A great shyness mastered him, and he bowed his head over her hand.

“Christine, can you forgive me? I have come back to hear you say you forgive me.”

Christine sat up and looked steadily at him.

“Can you forgive me?” he asked again.

“I have nothing to forgive; you were quite right.”

He lifted her hand to his lips passionately.

“No! I was wrong and blind and cowardly. I ought to have known. I am not worthy to touch you — to see you; but I love you. I can’t give you up. I am not fit to ask you to marry me, but you will make me a better man.”

He kissed her hand once more, but she drew it from him, and raised herself, and sorrowfully shook her head.

“It is too late. You did not think me good enough last year. I am no better now. The past is there still.”

Her quiet, hopeless tones unmanned him. Through his tears he looked at her. Was this sad, unemotional woman the wilful, passionate girl he had known? How quietly and firmly she set aside his love; and yet Boas, who knew her, had told him she loved him still. He did not know with what words to plead for himself, but he could not leave her like this.

“There is no past but the pain and shame I have heaped on you,” he said, with passionate remorse in his tones. “I am the one who

sinned. I was not good enough to see your goodness. And yet I felt your purity and innocence — all the time. For the moment I was blinded ; I saw with the world's eyes. I am at your feet now. You shall teach me."

"It is too late," she said again. "No good man could marry me."

"That is not true," he said. "And it is not a good man who is asking you to marry him now, but one whom you will make worthy of you. Christine, don't turn away like that. You don't mean — you can't mean — that you won't hear me."

"I can't hear you," she said. "You didn't love me or you would have understood — before. I can't forgive that. I should always remember it."

He looked in her face, and saw that there was no hope for him. There was no tenderness or love in her eyes, nothing but a hopeless decision. She had steeled herself against him.

He rose and stood before her, gazing down with dark eyes.

"I came back," he said hoarsely, "expecting to find you where they told me you had gone. If I had found you so — on the streets — I would not have taken 'No' from you. I would have made you my wife in spite of yourself. But now I can say nothing. You don't need

help of mine to make you a good woman. . . . But, oh, my child ! if my love had been less I would have wished that you had been vile that my heart might have been a shelter for you, that I could have proved to you how I love you."

Christine's hands flew to her face. She could bear his look no longer ; it threatened to draw from her the secret she wished to hide from him. Her love was not dead. It woke, alive and vivid, at the sound of his voice. It sprang to meet the high passion and noble purity of his nature.

She turned, sobbing, and buried her face on the cushions.

A word would have gained her then ; but Bevan was not wise to know his moment, and, in silence, he rose and left her.

Joanna met him in the hall, and drew him into her room, where she gave him comfort, while Boas sipped his tea, and listened to her with quizzical, excusing eyes.

"Women are all match-makers," he said, "the best of them. Miss Traill wanted to marry me to Christine, and just to satisfy her I had to propose to the girl. Now she won't be happy till she has got her married to you."

Joanna gave him a quick, amused glance. It was like Boas to lay the burden of his non-success on her. She was used to his weaknesses,

and did not object to them. They assured her that her idol was human.

"Your case is not hopeless," was her last word to Bevan. "Come again. She will never love any one else."

Boas took his arm down the steps.

"I can sympathise," he said comically; "I have been refused myself, but I rather liked it. . . . Hang it, man! don't look like Doomsday. The child loves you and you love her; it's only a question of time. Woman is like tobacco — she must be wooed cannily. I never succeeded in making a ring, if you remember. The luck was always with you."

"Was it?" said Bevan bitterly. "Nay, Boas, *you* are fortune's pet."

"Fortune's pet, maybe, but not fate's. A man of my constitution is always bungling into some difficulty. . . . Look here, Bevan, a lot of this business of yours and Christine's is due to my bungling. I thought the girl would have told her story to Miss Traill, but I suppose Miss Traill didn't care to talk about it, and never heard the real facts of the case. It would have made no difference to her if she had known, but I daresay you would have acted differently. I never could understand your brutality to Christine, but I suppose you misunderstood the case."

“What are you aiming at?” said Bevan impatiently. “Speak out, can’t you?”

“Well, Christine was not so bad as you thought. She did not go willingly into the life. She was ill and starving, and a girl took her home and looked after her. By and by the child woke up to find herself in debt. There was only one way of getting free, and they persuaded her to take it. When she knew what it was she loathed the life, as they all do, but she would never have escaped from it if I had not come across her. I took her away, and . . . you know the rest.”

The tears stood thick in Bevan’s eyes. He turned away his face from Boas.

“I shall never forgive myself,” he said hoarsely. “How can she ever forgive me?”

“It was not your fault,” said Boas; “and where a woman loves she can forgive anything.”

After a time Bevan was able to speak of other things. “Your acquaintance with Miss Traill seems to have made large strides during the year,” he said.

“Well, I’ve seen a good deal of her since she’s been in Poplar. She is my right hand — I could never get on without her. The work that woman is doing! — and when I first knew her she withered up if I only looked at her.

She has unlimited energy, resource, tact. Let me tell you some of the things she does to help people into better life. The Factory Girls' Guild, for instance" —

"Do you think I might venture to go down to Poplar again this week?" Bevan interrupted.

"Go along!" said Boas. "I'll have no more to do with you. A man in love can't be a philanthropist."

CHAPTER XV.

It was only a question of time, as Boas had said. No woman could have withstood Bevan's passionate pleading and penitent love. Certainly not Christine, who loved him.

The following winter the husband and wife started for Cairo. They went, of course, to Shepherd's; but the number of newly married people frightened them away to the Hotel du Nil, in the Arab quarter, where a courtyard full of palms and acacias and orange-trees offered sheltered corners in which Christine's happiness might lurk uncriticised.

New scenes and love were the best restoratives for her. In a few weeks Bevan wrote to Joanna that her old merriment and brightness were coming back, her fondness of pretty things also.

He said that she haunted the bazaars, and had bought so many presents for Boas — including a handsome narghile — that he was perforce jealous.

Joanna devoured the letters. Her child's

happiness was her own. She was feeling worn and tired, and had gone down to The Hatch for a little rest.

Boas was out of town, and Joanna, bereft of child and friend, said to herself she was again the lonely woman who had come to The Hatch five years ago. Yet she smiled as she said it, for she was a different woman from the one who had so meekly consented to dismiss her lover at the bidding of her sisters.

She looked back to the emotional crisis through which she had passed when she refused Mr. Raglan's offer, and wondered.

She smiled, too, but tenderly, at the picture of her old self grasping at such a phantom of love.

She knew now what love was, and she saw that her sisters were right—she had never loved Raglan.

She asked herself how had her knowledge of love grown in these five years? And she thanked God who had filled her life with love's crowning joy; for her whole being thrilled to the conviction that Boas loved her.

She knew it now without the shadow of a doubt, and she knew that some day he would wake up to the knowledge himself. Meanwhile, his friendship was enough for her.

Her love for Boas was that pure and imper-

sonal love, of which no man, and but one woman in ten thousand, is capable.

So long as she could see him, confide in him, speak to him, she was absolutely content. Away from him she was in a barren land. In his presence life blossomed.

She herself scarcely understood how she loved him. The depth of her passion could be fathomed by no moment's experience; but it possessed her, and surged through every channel of her being.

She knew that he had made her life complete, that she owed all that gave it worth and beauty to him. He was the inspiration of the best and highest in her, the power that vitalised every germ of good.

She slept with his name on her lips, and her first thought in the morning was a prayer for him.

Through the day every action bent towards the light of his approval; every imagination unfolded in the sunshine of his sanction.

She thought, read, wrote nothing that he might not have seen. She did no single act that he could not have owned as his work.

And this radiant love burnt always on the altar that to others seemed a desolate shrine. To Joanna it was the sacred fire that she tended night and day, knowing it was the gift of God.

She trembled sometimes at the depth of her passion ; and there were moments of its realisation that snatched the breath from her lips and stopped the beating of her heart. Yet, feeling thus towards him, she could meet him as an ordinary acquaintance, and show by no change in her white face the fires that glowed and burned under the ice.

Boas had never suspected the existence of any such feeling on her part ; even as he had no conception of the nature of his friendship for her.

It was quite natural that a man of his temperament, absorbed in his work, should lean on her, find his strength in her, yet be unconscious of the meaning of it all. They had met as strangers, and their work had made them in a moment intimate. And the intimacy of such interests and such work had disguised the real nature of their intercourse.

The women had recognised it first. Boas, who had never before been touched by personal love, had no suspicion of it.

Joanna smiled to herself, thinking of the way in which he monopolised her, consulted her, showed she was necessary to him, yet never discovered the pulse beating through their association.

She was content with things as they were.

If two were one in spirit, the legal form could not make their union more complete.

Yet, for woman is moulded of contradiction, under this content — scarcely suspected by herself — was the formless desire to have his kiss on her lips, to hear him call her wife.

She opened again the letter she had received from him that morning, and laughed aloud at the boyish, unconscious betrayal of his love.

He was older than she. She had followed him in awe and reverence; he had taught her all she knew; yet already into her love for him had come that motherliness which idealises the love of every true woman for her lord. He was in Edinburgh. Life would be perfect, he said, if she were sharing it with him.

He would be back in a fortnight, and he wished, nay, commanded, that she should rest at The Hatch till his return.

“I have a scheme that will tax all your powers, so rest while you may. If you were near me now it would crystallise in action, but I can do nothing without you. I am beginning to see how I depend upon you. Every moment I miss your sympathy and help.

“But I am reminded of you in other ways too. Nature seems to reflect you here, in the true North. On Arthur’s Seat to-day I saw a pearly sunset. The clouds were like you — tender, peaceful, suggestive. They were the colour of the gown you wore at Christine’s wedding. The young people seem happy. What a blessing she refused me!

Write and tell me how you get on, what you do every day, what you read, think, say — everything! — Yours,

“ J. B.”

A telegram interrupted her. It was from Carshalton, from her brother-in-law, Mr. Crane.

“ Sarah ill. Come if possible.”

In a moment Joanna had forgotten her fatigue. She ordered the carriage, dressed hastily. An hour after stood at her sister's bedside.

Mrs. Crane was weeping genuine tears, heedless for once of her *pince-nez*.

“ Oh, Joanna, you have come. After Rachel's selfishness I didn't know whether to expect you. Charlie wired for her. She actually refused to come. Inhuman monster! When I am dead she will repent it.”

Mrs. Crane's dainty *mouchoir* was inadequate to her emotion. Joanna thought whimsically of her words. “ Grief enshrined in cambric, not hemstitched.”

“ What is it, dear? What is it?” she said, alarmed.

“ Oh, I don't know. It is awful. I suppose I shall die — diphtheria.”

“ Diphtheria?”

“ Yes. Did you ever know of anything so horrible? My only comfort is that it is not

smallpox, I couldn't have borne that. We only knew this morning. Charlie has gone for a nurse. Do I look very hideous?"

"When did it begin?"

"I have had a bad throat for days. It has been neglected. Charlie would never notice if I were ill. But I am not one to complain. Take off your things, Joanna. Of course you will stay."

"Yes. But your voice is strong. You speak easily."

"It is bad for all that; but I am not a woman to give in all at once. Get me another handkerchief, will you? The top drawer. And give me the hand-glass, Joanna; I am sure I'm a fright, and I want you to get out my silk nightdresses. If I am in bed I need not look antiquated. Diphtheria! Such a dangerous thing! Hand me that gargle. I am certain I sha'n't recover. People never do. And the selfishness of Fergus in not letting Rachel come to me. But men are all the same. They only think of their own comfort."

"For the children's sake she ought not to come," said Joanna. "Do lie still, Sarah, I am sure you ought not to talk."

"What else is there for me to do?" Mrs. Crane asked irritably. "But that is just like you, Joanna; you never think of other people

—always your own comfort. And you might have given parties at The Hatch instead of mixing up with low people at the East end. But what was to be expected when you adopted a girl from nowhere?”

“Sarah, dear, if you talk so much I must go.”

“I am sure it is a blessing she is married. Now I hope you will settle down quietly at The Hatch. I suppose you know the women of that house live and die old maids. It is evident Mr. Boas will do nothing to change the doom. . . .” Joanna rose to go out, and Mrs. Crane retired behind her handkerchief.

“You can go,” she sobbed. “No one cares for me; even my own husband says my throat is not bad. He says it couldn’t be less, for diphtheria. And the doctor is a brute, telling me I am more frightened than hurt. I get no sympathy. . . .”

So it went on day after day.

Mrs. Crane’s attack was of the mildest, but she exacted the attention of every person in the house.

The nurse held her own against her demands, but Joanna was helpless.

All day long, and at night too, she was at the mercy of the querulous invalid, who would not allow her out of her sight. Mrs. Crane was actually jealous of her sister. “Joanna

is really very attractive now," she said to herself; "and I don't know why, for she hasn't a good feature; and Charlie is so impressionable, and . . ."

So Joanna became the victim of an absurd suspicion, and for ten days she sacrificed herself to the whims of a selfish woman. On the tenth day her strength failed. Without a word to her sister, she went away quietly to The Hatch, and to bed.

She had taken the disease, and in her spent condition it was likely to go hard with her.

.

The telegram announcing Boas lay unopened on the table in the dining room, swallowed up in the prevailing darkness.

The Hatch was gloomier than ever, its doom resting heavily upon it. More than the ivy kept out the thin winter sun to-day, for all the blinds were drawn.

Boas was hurrying down to Sutton to consult Joanna. He had arrived in town the previous night full of his scheme, and he was impatient till he had laid it before her.

He strummed restlessly on the seat of the third-class carriage, and knit his brows when a signal against the train detained it some minutes.

"You are like me, sir, in a hurry," said the man opposite to him

“Right,” said Boas.

“Stoppages is hard on them what has work before 'em, and I can ill spare five minutes to-day, I am that overworked.”

“Don't grumble at work, my good man. It's our greatest blessing.”

“Ay, I'm not saying it ain't. But six coffins in one day is hard on a man.”

“Better than one only—for your own use.”

“And I've been up all night, and had to go to town first thing, and again this afternoon to get this. And a beautiful bit of work it is—never saw a prettier.”

He unfolded the parcel on his knee, and held up a coffin-plate to Boas, who, glancing carelessly at the words, read while his thoughts wandered away with his scheme—

JOANNA TRAILL, SPINSTER.

Born—— Died——.

She was so much in his thoughts that the name did not at the first moment convey any special meaning to him, and he was scarcely conscious of the man speaking.

“A pretty piece of work it is, but none too good for her it's for. I was never so taken aback in my life as when I was sent for. Nobody so much as knew she was ill. The next thing—she's gone.”

“What do you say?” said Boas, rousing himself.”

“The lady of The Hatch, sir—big house on the Epsom road—she’s dead. You may have heard of her, Miss Traill; very charitable to the poor she was. Taken off quite sudden; close on forty; though you wouldn’t think it now she’s laid out.”

Boas turned his head aside, closing his eyes to shut out the sight of that pitiful “Joanna Traill, Spinster. Born——. Died——.”

Between these last two words his own life was written.

.

The silence round the house quieted him. He went on tiptoe up the steps to the front door.

The bell hung loose; the knocker was shrouded; the door stood ajar. He pushed it open and entered.

The hall was just as he had seen it when he had run down to say good-bye before leaving for the north.

The piano was strewn with music. A map of the East end, Joanna’s stylograph, a paper jotted with notes, were on the table. He expected to see her rise from one of those dark corners to meet him.

But nothing in the dim room stirred, and the silence held him fast. He could not move a limb.

Presently there was a rustle of silk, and Mrs. Prothero came forward. Her face was red and swollen. She took his hand and burst into tears.

"Oh, Mr. Boas, I have just seen your telegram! You didn't know? — hadn't heard?"

"Not a word till now."

She sank down into a seat, and Boas held the back of a chair, and waited till she could speak.

"Mr. Boas, it is too dreadful! The saddest thing . . . and so sudden. None of us with her. . . . Fergus wouldn't let me. . . . Did you know she had been at Carshalton?"

He bent his head.

"Yes, she was there. Mrs. Crane had diphtheria, and Joanna took it. She came back here ill, and nobody knew. Next day she sent word. Begged us not to come . . . the children. . . . It was very rapid. Last night . . . nurse had left her to get something. When she came back . . . you must excuse me, it was so terrible . . . to die alone . . . she . . . so full of sympathy, love . . ."

"Why was I not told?"

Boas's hands tightened on the chair till the veins rose swollen and purple.

"She wouldn't let us tell. She was afraid . . . you would come. Unselfish to the last. She left a note for you . . . I have it here . . ."

Mrs. Prothero handed him a letter.

"She couldn't speak after the first day. But she had a message for you . . . and wrote. . . . She thought so highly of you . . . always."

"Let me see her."

"Oh, Mr. Boas, the risk — infection."

He shook his head impatiently.

"I haven't seen her — none of us. Fergus . . . forbids. He doesn't like me even to be here," Mrs. Prothero sobbed.

Boas stepped forward.

"In which room?"

"Up-stairs. The first door. You will see. I mustn't go with you ; but nurse" —

"Don't send any one. Let me be alone."

Slowly he climbed the interminable steps, holding her letter in his hand. A sheet soaked in disinfectants hung over the door. Inside the room he turned the key in the lock, moving softly. She was asleep, he knew.

Memory played tricks with him. He was in Joanna's flat in Poplar, stepping on tiptoe into the room where Christine lay asleep. He was Bevan come to ask her to marry him.

A cold wind from the open window met his forehead and freshened his dazed senses. The smell of the earth after rain recalled the day on which he had first seen Joanna in her own home.

He was no longer in Poplar, but at The

Hatch. Joanna had called him to her, and he had come in answer to her telegram: "I want your help. Come."

Was this the way she greeted him — coldly, in silence?

His eyes wandered round the room. Last, they touched the bed, and the pathos of that clinging sheet.

With a groan he stepped forward, his limbs shaking beneath him, and drew aside the cloth, and met the marble of the calm face.

It was Joanna; to him she appeared more wonderfully lovely than the loveliest woman he had ever seen.

Her hands were folded on her breast. Her lips smiled deeply. The noble quiet of the face stilled his anguish. He stood motionless, and the peace of the white presence enfolded him. With fixed eyes he gazed down at her, half-remembered words Mrs. Prothero had said beating on his ears.

"Last night. Alone — alone. Last night." They fell on his brain, stunning him.

Alone, without sister or child or friend! she who had been best sister, truest friend, tenderest mother.

That loving heart had gone out into the darkness, facing the dread shadows alone. No smile, no hand, no voice of prayer, no word of farewell,

no love beside her. As she had lived she had died — alone, though he loved her.

He knew it now. He seemed to have known it ever since he had read the words, “Joanna Traill, Spinster.”

“Spinster?” No! Joanna Traill was his wife; but he had not known it till he had seen her name on the coffin-plate. If she had known he loved her he could have borne to see her lying there with no love for his love. . . .

Fool, fool that he had been to let the golden hours slip! He might have filled her life with gladness, as she had filled his with strength and purpose. And now it was too late. Lonely she had gone out of life, not knowing that she had been the one woman in the world for him.

He clenched his fingers, crushing in his hand the letter that would take the sharp sting from his anguish — the words in which Joanna blessed him for the love he had given her.

.

By and by he became calmer.

The smile on her dead face rebuked his passion. He could not look on it and doubt that her life had been complete, rounded to its perfect development.

Hours passed while he stood beside her, and the shadows gathered deeper in the room, and chiselled more clearly the cold outline of that

marble face, all that was left to him of his love.

And then darkness snatched from him even this white treasure.

“My own! My very own!” he groaned aloud, and stooped and kissed her lips.

THE END.

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